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"FAREWELL, TO STAY ANOTHER HOUR UNDER THIS ROOF IS SHAME INDEED!"

Flirtation; or, A Young Girl's Good Name.

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CHAPTER I.

DESIRÉE.

"ARE we ready to raise the anchor?"

"We are, captain."

"Have you supplied the places of those of the crew who were stricken with yellow fever at Havana?"

"I have. Here is the list."

The first lieutenant of the ship *Fortuna*, bound from New Orleans to New York, commanded and owned by Captain Harold Fairchild, handed the paper to his superior officer.

"What's this?" he exclaimed, glancing at the list: "all Spaniards!"

"It was the best I could do. No one else would accept service for fear of the yellow fever."

"But there's not a particle of danger now."

"So I told them, but they would not believe me. They pointed to the fact that we return without any passengers."

"True, and I'm not sorry for it. I mistrust these Spanish or Cuban dogs. You'll arrange the watches so that these new-comers are never alone on deck. Now give the order to raise the anchors."

"Beg pardon, captain," said an old sailor, stepping up; "there's a boat comin' alongside with a lady in it."

"A lady!"

"There she is."

The *Fortuna* was lying at anchor in the channel, on a pleasant evening in the spring of 1873, and the captain, gazing in the direction pointed out by the sailor, saw a row-boat, pulled by two men, and containing a lady with her baggage approaching.

"It is evidently a passenger," he muttered; "I hardly care to receive her."

The boat now reached the ship's side and the lady was assisted on deck.

"Madame—" began he.

"Desirée Rochfort, if you please," said the lady with a slight blush.

"Miss Rochfort, I presume you wish to be a passenger on board my ship. The pleasure is an unexpected one, and, I am sorry to say, one which I am obliged to refuse."

A shade of disappointment passed over her countenance.

"And why?" she asked.

"Because I have no other passengers, and you are a lady and alone."

She burst into a merry laugh.

"Is that all?" she exclaimed. "I'm not afraid. You men won't eat me up."

"The ship is reputed to be infected with yellow fever."

"I'm a New Orleans girl and not afraid of it. Some better reason, sir."

"I mistrust part of my crew. They are strangers to me and may mutiny."

"You would conquer them."

"I prefer that the exigency should not happen."

"A brave captain does not shun danger."

"A prudent one does not court it," was his smiling repartee. "I see, Miss Rochfort, that you are determined to remain on board."

"That I am!" she replied, with a mischievous sparkle in her eye. "If my father was of French descent, my mother was a Yankee woman, and I have something of your Northern indomitableness in my veins. So you may as well resign yourself to the inevitable."

Her frank, fearless demeanor completely overcame the captain's hesitancy, and, turning, he bade the men in the boat row back to the shore.

"It is a grave responsibility which I assume, Miss Rochfort," said he, offering her his arm. "I hope that I will prove myself worthy of it."

Giving some final orders to his lieutenant, he led the lady below to show her the cabin she was to occupy during the voyage.

Concealed behind some bales of cotton which formed part of the cargo on deck, two of the new sailors had overheard the conversation.

"*Caramba!*" whispered one, nudging the other, "a pretty woman."

"Will she form part of the booty?" asked his companion.

"That she shall! I swear it, *pe Santa Maria!*"

"The captain suspects us."

"He's a coward. He as well as confessed it to the woman herself."

"When shall it take place?"

"When we get out on the high seas. We seize the ship and join the Cuban *Junta*. You know it was all arranged before we shipped. And now *basta!*"

It was under these auspices that the *Fortuna* turned her prow toward New York.

The voyage was a pleasant one, and a succession of fine days gave the captain plenty of opportunity to linger in the company of his fair passenger.

He learned that she was twenty-one years of age, an orphan, and had just come into possession of a small plantation. She was going to New York to find a purchaser, and, in the mean time, to take a position as teacher or governess. She had missed the regular steamer and had preferred sailing with the *Fortuna* to waiting for the next vessel. She had a letter of introduction to the family of Mr. Rathburn, a prominent New York banker, given to her by Mrs. Rathburn's brother who was located in New Orleans.

"I know the Rathburns, very well," said the captain to her, when she told him this. "They are an excellent family, I assure you."

"Now that you know all about me," merrily exclaimed Desirée, "you must give me an account of yourself."

"That's very easily done," he smilingly replied. "I'm an old bachelor of thirty-five; my life has been mostly passed at sea, and never having been much in society, I have never experienced what it is to love—that is, with one exception."

"Ah, then there is an exception," she archly commented.

"Yes—my mother. She is my bride, my wife, my all. For her my heart throbs with a devotion beside which all puny loves between man and woman sink into insignificance. I live but for her."

His thick-set somewhat homely features became almost transformed, while his short, burly form seemed to enlarge and expand as he uttered these words with a fervency that the pen cannot do justice to.

"Happy mother!" exclaimed Desirée deeply moved. "A woman can possess no brighter jewel than the love of a grown son."

It was one of those clear, starlit evenings seen only near the tropics.

All around was peace and quiet.

Leaning against the taffrail stood Desirée gazing dreamily at the phosphorescent gleam of the waters around her. Suddenly she felt herself lightly touched on the shoulder and, turning, beheld one of the Spanish sailors standing before her.

There was something in the pale face and excited manner of the man which startled her, yet he addressed her politely enough:

"Beg pardon, miss, but you had better go below."

"Why?" she asked, apprehensively.

"It—it is safer there."

"Safer?"

"Yes, but not in your cabin. I may not be able to control my men. In my cabin, yes, go in my cabin. You can lock the door."

"I do not understand; what do you mean?"

"You are my prize, not my men's. They shall not harm you. I will shoot them down like dogs, if they lay a hand on you."

"Are you mad?" she cried, now thoroughly alarmed. "What language is this to me?"

"I love you, miss; I—"

His words were interrupted by a loud scream from Desirée.

"*Por Dios!*" roared the Spaniard. "She will ruin us."

"Help, help!" shrieked Desirée wildly. "Mutiny, mutiny!"

"Down with the *Americanos!* *Viva la Junta!*" cried the Spaniards and Creoles suddenly appearing on deck with cutlasses and revolvers drawn.

"Help, captain, help!" screamed Desirée, escaping from the clutches of the Spaniard and rushing toward the companionway.

"*Caramba!*" shouted he darting after her, but only to encounter the burly form of the captain who, at that moment, came bounding up the ladder.

He caught the leader of the mutineers by the throat and his fingers tightened like a vise. He spoke not a word but continued the terrible pressure. The mutineer's face turned purple, he sought to speak but could not; he gasped for breath; his tongue hung limp from his mouth; his eyes protruded from their sockets.

The other mutineers stood gazing in mute astonishment at this exhibition of brute strength. They saw their leader being slowly, remorselessly strangled to death and did not dare to intervene.

The sight was too awful for Desirée.

"Spare his life!" she begged.

"He does not deserve it," coolly and calmly replied the captain. "But, since you desire it, it shall be so. The law will be his executioner, not I."

He let go his fearful clasp and the Spaniard fell to the deck like a lump of lead.

Captain Fairchild surveyed the group of mutineers who were standing around him. As his eagle eye rested for an instant on each person, and a flash of lightning seemed to dart from his eyes to theirs, they, each in turn, dropped their weapons, as if some unseen power had pulled them from their hands.

"He is positively handsome," thought Desirée, as she gazed at him, at that moment.

An intense pause followed.

"Men," said he, still preserving his wonderful coolness and self-possession, "what did you hope to gain by mutinying against me? Did you expect that miserable fellow lying there gasping for breath, could lead you to victory? Unarmed I conquered him. Had you raised your hands to aid him you would now have been corpses. Prove it to them, my true and loyal ones."

Each mutineer felt himself instantly in the iron grasp of a sailor, while a revolver was pressed against his forehead.

"Pardon! Mercy!" they exclaimed with one voice.

The captain made a sign and the sailors put up their weapons.

"If it had come to the worst," he quickly continued, "I have the magazine connected by a fuse with every part of the ship. I or any one of my men would have blown up the vessel and in the very moment of your victory, the mangled fragments of your corpses would have strewn the sea."

He threw a pair of handcuffs and an iron chain to the mutineers.

"Bind your leader," he ordered.

They instantly obeyed.

"You will bring him to his cabin. The ship's surgeon will attend him. When we arrive in New York he will be handed over to the authorities. As for you, return to your duties. Let your leader's fate be a warning not to repeat the folly of attempting a mutiny on board my ship. Come, Miss Rochfort; you may rest in peace. There'll be no more mutinies on this voyage."

With the grace of a knight of the olden time, he offered her his arm and escorted her below.

"He's as generous as he is brave," she thought, as she accompanied him; "I'd be very proud to be his sister."

CHAPTER II.

A YOUNG GIRL'S ROMANCE.

THE Rathburns, the family to whom Desirée was recommended, consisted of Mr. Rathburn, a wealthy banker, a man of about fifty-six years, his wife and son and daughter. Orville, the son, was a young man of twenty-seven, the ordinary type of the scion of a wealthy house. He was handsome, passably intelligent, loved fine clothes, had a *penchant* for wine, women, cards and fast horses, and indulged in these fashionable foibles without passing that limit where they degenerate into vice.

As for Blanche Rathburn, a beautiful blonde of eighteen summers, her insipid, monotonous life had been ruffled only once, and that slightly, by what she herself called a boarding-school romance.

Two years previous when she was a girl of sixteen and an inmate of a ladies' boarding school situated on the Hudson, she had, one day, slipped away from the watchfulness of her teachers and roamed through the neighboring woods in search of wild flowers. When, however, she wished to retrace her steps, she discovered, to her great alarm, that she had lost her way.

The afternoon's sun was fast sinking in the western horizon; already the shadows of night were gathering around her.

Childlike, she had a mortal dread of darkness; behind every tree she saw a robber. She screamed aloud; only the echo of her voice answered her. She threw away the flowers which had now become hateful to her, and, sinking down on the trunk of a fallen tree, she covered her face with her apron and wept aloud.

"Hello!"

The word uttered in bright cheery tones caused her to quickly lower her apron.

A youth stood before her, twirling in his hands a twig cut from a tree. To her frightened imagination he appeared like a gigantic monster brandishing a huge club.

"Oh, Mister Robber," she exclaimed, falling on her knees before him, "please don't murder me. I'm only a poor girl who has lost her way."

The youth burst into a merry laugh.

"Murder you?" he cried. "Gaze on me. Do I look like a robber?" She timidly raised her tear-stained face to his and saw that he was as handsome a young fellow of twenty-one as could be found anywhere in the world.

"Excuse me, sir," she said rising; "I took you at first for a highwayman."

"The race is extinct. I took you for a fairy of the woods."

"That race is also extinct," she laughingly replied.

"I can't say but that I prefer a young and pretty girl to a fairy."

"And I a gentleman to a robber."

"I hope that I am a gentleman, miss. My name is Alfred Barton. I am Captain Fairchild's clerk, on my way to Innwood."

"To Innwood?"

To the country residence of Mr. Rathburn, the banker.

"My father?"

Alfred drew back a step and politely doffed his hat.

"Have I the honor of addressing Miss Rathburn?"

"I am Blanche Rathburn," she replied. "I am being educated in the ladies' seminary. We were out in the woods to-day and I lost my way through my own fault."

"It is only a mile to the seminary; I will escort you there."

"I prefer to go home."

"But it is two miles to Innwood."

"I don't care," she replied, with a pretty pout. "I hate to go back to school."

"As you please, Miss Rathburn. But first, let me pick up these pretty flowers which you have thrown away."

He did so, and, forming them into an attractive bouquet, handed it to her.

Then the two, side by side, took up their way through the forest. It was a delightful, though dangerously romantic, moonlight promenade.

The village bell of the pretty suburban resort chimed forth the hour of nine, when they reached the Rathburn villa.

Great was the astonishment of the family when they beheld Blanche, whom they believed safe at the seminary, enter with a young stranger.

Mrs. Rathburn felt scandalized.

Orville, who, for a wonder, happened to be home, deliberated on an immediate challenge to a duel.

Mr. Rathburn knit his eyebrows and was about to lecture his daughter on the impropriety of the proceeding, when he was peremptorily silenced by Blanche rushing into his arms and closing his lips with a kiss.

"Here I am, papa," she exclaimed, in her breathless manner, "safe and sound, and I've had such a terrible adventure, and you'd never have seen me alive again if it wasn't for this young gentleman; he's Alfred Barton, papa, Captain Fairchild's clerk, with a commission for you; and I want you to thank him and not scold me one bit either, so there!"

And having come to a pause for want of breath, she took off her hat and embraced her mother.

"But, my child," began the indulgent father.

"If you're going to scold me," interrupted she, mischievously, "I'll never go back to the seminary."

"Permit me to explain, sir," modestly said Alfred, and in a few words he related what had occurred.

"You have done us a service, sir, which we will never forget," said Mr. Rathburn, cordially extending his hand to the young man. "I am glad to make the acquaintance of a gentleman whom Captain Fairchild honors with his confidence."

"My daughter is a giddy young thing," rather stiffly added Mrs. Rathburn. "It will be best for your own peace of mind to forget that you accidentally met her this evening."

"Oh, mamma!" reproachfully exclaimed Blanche.

"Madam," haughtily replied Alfred, a flush mounting his handsome face, "the consciousness of my station in life is a trait strongly developed in my character."

"I am glad to hear it, my young friend," said the lady, with a bow.

"Barton, old boy, you're a brick!" exclaimed Orville. "I'm her brother, you know. Don't be building any air-castles on this little racket of hers, and you'll be all right. What do you say to a cigar and a game of billiards?"

"I would be happy to oblige you, but I must deliver my commission to Mr. Rathburn and catch the train back to the city."

Having transacted his business with the head of the house, he bade them adieu and was driven to the depot in the family phaeton.

"A fine young man," said the banker, to his wife, when they were alone that evening. "He'd make a good husband for Blanche."

"Bah, a clerk!" she retorted. "Blanche has the right to aspire higher and will do so, you may depend on it."

"We shall see."

"We will."

Had Mrs. Rathburn not been so pointed in her remarks to Alfred, the youth might have forgotten all about his episode of meeting with Blanche. As it was, however, his pride had been touched and he began to reason himself into the belief that he had as much right to fall in love with her as any man in New York. He therefore, almost involuntarily, found himself haunting the vicinity of the seminary, eager to catch a glimpse of the face which had become so dear to him.

As for Blanche, the idea of having a sweetheart, stolen interviews, missives secreted in the hollow trunk of a tree, was perfectly entrancing. It was just like in a novel, and that for her was an infallible rule of life. She was only sixteen: of love she had only a vague idea; of marriage, none at all.

The stolen interviews were had, the secret

correspondence began and continued; Alfred hugged his secret to his breast like a miser his gold, while Blanche faithfully reported to a group of admiring schoolmates every tender word spoken, and read aloud to them every billetdoux received.

Thus matters stood when, one fine morning, Alfred received a summary order from Captain Fairchild to proceed at once to San Francisco to transact some important business for the firm.

He was in despair.

To refuse to go would be to blight his future prospects; to leave New York, and that, too, for an indefinite time, threatened to put an abrupt end to his dream of love.

He was very much downcast when he next saw Blanche, and when she asked him the cause, he told her.

"You are going to California, to San Francisco?" she exclaimed, clapping her hands. "How delightful!"

He stared at her in surprise.

"You find it delightful that I am going to leave New York—to leave you?" he bitterly asked.

"Of course! All lovers do so. Why, the very romance of a love affair is the separation. Just think of it; the tender farewell, the vows of undying affection, the parting kiss; then, the long letters breathing love in every word, finally the welcome home again; can there be anything more delightful?"

"You look only on the bright side of the picture. But, suppose the absent lover is forgotten—suppose he returns only to find that another has usurped his place in his girl's heart, what then?"

"Oh, then," she replied, in all earnestness, "he must commit suicide; that's the proper thing to do."

"And that's what I would do," he ardently exclaimed, "were I to return and find you another's bride."

"But, I won't be, dear Alfred. Haven't I told you so a hundred times? Either my parents must consent to our marriage or I'll become an old maid and be a teacher in a ladies' seminary."

As this was the worst possible fate she thought could befall her, she uttered the words as solemnly as though she were reading her own death-warrant.

"I will take you at your word," said he, seriously. "And now, Blanche, farewell. I leave to-morrow, and will not be able to see you again before my departure. I do not know when I shall return, but I hope that it will not be long. Think of me always and write often. Propriety will forbid me from answering your dear letters, but you can hear from me through Captain Fairchild. Be assured that I will never cease loving you."

He drew her toward him and pressed a kiss on her lips.

It was the first time that he had dared to take that liberty, and Blanche's face was suffused with blushes when she released herself from his embrace.

Thus they parted.

For the first few weeks Blanche was very melancholy, and secretly wrote numerous letters to her dear Alfred, but her natural gayety soon took the ascendancy, and, as it did so, her correspondence languished, and finally ceased altogether.

The faint spark of love which had glimmered in her heart needed her lover's presence to fan into a flame. Had Alfred answered her letters it might have been different, but he could not do so without compromising her.

Two years had passed away since he had left New York, and in that time Blanche had graduated from the seminary and been introduced, by her prudent mother, into that society where she was likely to meet with a wealthy husband.

Absorbed in a round of pleasures, praised, flattered, on all sides, Blanche entirely forgot poor absent Alfred, or if she did at all think of him, it was, as she remarked, in the light of a boarding-school romance, through which every well-regulated young lady has to pass, as through a course of measles, but which is laid aside when short dresses are exchanged for trails.

And this was the Rathburn family, to join which Desirée Rochfort was speeding in the good ship *Fortuna*, with Captain Fairchild at the helm.

CHAPTER III.

MOTHER AND SON.

In South street, in the city of New York, not far from Fulton ferry there is a quaint, odd-looking edifice built entirely of massive granite. Untouched by the decorative hand of modern

architecture, it rears its plain solid front between more pretentious buildings of a later date.

In this building, at the time of which this story treats, was the office of Captain Fairchild. During his absence his business was attended to by his mother.

Mrs. Fairchild was a lady of about fifty-five years old, tall and distinguished looking, her silvery gray hair giving her a venerable appearance. Her face was pale and slightly tinged with an air of melancholy, lightened by the fact of her always wearing black.

On the morning of which we write she touched a bell and summoned a clerk from the outer office.

"James," she said, "do you know that the *Fortuna* is expected in port to-day?"

"The ship has already been signaled, ma'am," he replied. "She will be at the wharf in an hour."

"Very well. You will please escort me there, and then go to Jay Cooke & Co., the bankers, and tell them, in my son's name, that we are sorry not to be able to advance them the sum they ask."

"All the world has confidence in their stability," ventured the clerk.

"Except I," answered she, dryly. "I will be ready in half an hour."

At the appointed time, Mrs. Fairchild, having put on her hat and cloak and covered her face with a long black veil, left the office with the clerk.

When they arrived at the pier the ship had just come in and soon mother and son were folded in a long embrace.

"This is indeed a surprise, mother," delightedly exclaimed Harold, "you, who never go out, to meet me here."

"I was so anxious to greet you," she fondly replied.

Standing on the deck, Desirée had observed the warm welcome.

Tears rose in her eyes as she murmured.

"How they love each other; what a heart he has!"

Captain Fairchild cordially greeted his clerk and, when the latter told him the commission Mrs. Fairchild had given him, smilingly said:

"Jay Cooke & Co! Who but my mother would dream of refusing them credit? Well, do as she says; I'm not home until I'm in my office."

All the officers and the crew were, meanwhile, crowding around Mrs. Fairchild, eager to testify the high regard in which they held their captain's mother.

Her quick eyes, however, soon discerned the presence of Desirée on board the ship.

"How is this, my son?" said she, drawing Harold aside. "A lady on deck, a passenger?"

"The only one," laughingly replied he.

"The only one?"

"There, don't fall into convulsions. She is a lady whom I hope you will receive as a daughter."

"Then may I congratulate you—"

"You entirely mistake my meaning," he interrupted, with a hearty laugh; "let me explain in a few words."

He briefly related how Desirée had come on board, and her intentions in coming to New York.

Mrs. Fairchild was touched by the orphan's lonely position, and she was ready to receive her with all of a mother's tenderness.

On one point only she seemed to hesitate.

"She is recommended to the Rathburns?" she asked.

"Yes; why do you ask?"

"I hardly know them. You have had business intercourse with them. Are they worthy of the trust?"

"They are excellent people, so far as I know."

"Then I am satisfied."

Desirée had by this time disembarked, and hesitatingly approached the two.

Mrs. Fairchild threw her arms around her and fondly kissed her.

"My son has told me all about you, Miss Rochfort—Desirée. You are heartily welcome to New York. I will be a mother to you."

"Believe me, madam," replied she, brushing a tear from her eyes, "I will be grateful."

"I know it, my child."

"Come, mother, and Miss Rochfort," interrupted Harold. "Let us go home, where we can make our toilet and take a lunch. Then I will escort Miss Rochfort to Mr. Rathburn's."

"She might remain with us for a few days," suggested his mother.

"It would be impolite to Mr. Rathburn," said

Desirée, "or I would only be too happy to do so."

The party now left the pier, and engaging a *coupe* drove to Harold's residence, which was situated in the vicinity of Gramercy Park.

A table tastily prepared awaited them in the dining-room, and as Harold was sooner done with his simple toilet than Desirée, he embraced the opportunity to question his mother as to the condition of his affairs.

"What an admirable business woman you are," he exclaimed, after she had given him a brief summary. "To you I owe all my wealth. What was I at the outbreak of the war but a simple sea-captain? Whose advice was it to put all my spare cash in cotton? That was the basis of my wealth. How could you, a simple woman—"

"I became a man," she interrupted, "the day when I took the place of the father who had disowned you."

The shade of melancholy deepened in her face as she spoke.

"Why recall the past, mother?" he fondly murmured. "I no longer ask you to tell me his name."

"I will tell you," she gently replied, "when you will have pardoned him as I have."

Harold took two or three strides up and down the room, and then to change the subject, said: "I'll wager that, while I was gone, you busied yourself in reckoning up my fortune."

"I did. It amounts to nearly a million. It is a large sum. What will become of all this money when you are gone?"

"I don't know," he carelessly replied. "I guess I'll bequeath it to the foundling asylum."

His mother sighed deeply.

"Would it not be better," she hesitatingly said, "to have children of your own to bequeath it to?"

"I, marry?" he exclaimed, in somber tones; "you again broach that subject?"

"It would afford me great consolation to have grandchildren," she sadly replied.

He took her hand in his, and gazing earnestly into her face said:

"Mother, when the hour of my birth drew nigh, you, a divorced wife, secretly left New York; you changed your name and went to a village where you were unknown. Here I was born. With what name shall I endow the woman who is to become my wife?"

"The name which I have assumed and which you have made so honorable."

"And if she were to discover it to be a false one?"

"She would keep the fact a secret."

"I would not want her to know the fact at all."

"Oh, my poor child," murmured Mrs. Fairchild, in tear-choked tones, "you blush for your mother."

He folded her ardently in his embrace, and kissed the tear-drops from her eyes.

"You mistake me, mother," he eagerly said. "I revere, I adore you; my love, my affection for you is my religion, and if I perceived that my wife did not share my veneration—"

He paused, and something of the ferociousness which signaled his handling of the leader of the mutineers, appeared in his eyes.

"I am naturally retiring and timid, but I feel that, with these hands, I could strangle her."

"Harold!" cried his mother, horrified.

"Now you can comprehend why I do not want to marry," he exclaimed, flinging himself on the sofa and wiping his perspiring brow with his handkerchief.

Mrs. Fairchild approached him gently, and bending over him kissed him on the forehead.

"I comprehend and thank you," she said. "But, do you not believe that there is, in all the world, one woman worthy of your confidence?"

"Yes, a woman who has suffered enough to deserve it."

"Miss Rochfort, for instance," suggested his mother, with a faint smile.

"She would understand no better than another," he somewhat hastily rejoined.

"Who knows? Will you permit me to probe her heart?"

"Never!" replied he, springing to his feet.

"What good would it do? Would she want me? I have never been handsome, and my rude existence was not made to better my looks. I am fifteen years older than she—"

"What matters that? She will learn your worth and be proud to become your wife."

"Hush!" he implored. "Not a word more. She is coming."

With a deep sigh Mrs. Fairchild turned from

her son to greet Desirée who, at that moment, entered the room, radiant with health and beauty.

"I fear I have kept you waiting," the young girl said, as she kissed her, "but, you know, ladies are always dilatory over their toilet."

"You are excused, Desirée," replied Mrs. Fairchild. "How familiar for me to call you by your Christian name. Do you know, my child, I can hardly realize that it is but an hour since we first met? It seems to me as if I had known you all my life."

"That's because you have such a good heart," gratefully replied she.

The three now sat down to lunch and after the repast was finished Harold ordered a carriage to take him and Desirée to Mr. Rathburn's office.

He thought it best to introduce her to the banker first, before she became one of the family.

"You must come and see me very often," urged Mrs. Fairchild as the vehicle drove off.

"You may be sure I will," Desirée called back.

Mr. Rathburn was sitting in his private office when his visitors were announced.

He knew Captain Fairchild and esteemed him highly, and having learned the purport of their visit and of his brother-in-law's letter, he put Desirée completely at ease with a few well-chosen words of welcome.

"You can make your home with us for as long a time as you please," he said. "Mrs. Rathburn, I am sure, will receive you as a daughter, and you will find in Blanche, my daughter, a kind and affectionate sister. My *coupe* will be ready in a moment and I shall take the pleasure of introducing you to my family."

"You are too kind, sir," murmured Desirée in reply.

"May we have the pleasure of your company, Captain Fairchild?" asked the banker.

"I am sorry that business obliges me to decline your present invitation," he answered, "but, at some future time, I shall avail myself of the permission."

"We will be always happy to see you."

"You must not forget to call on me," said Desirée, as the captain parted from her; "we are firm friends, you know."

"Nor you to redeem your promise to my mother."

A few minutes later Desirée entered the *coupe* with Mr. Rathburn to be driven to the magnificent mansion which the family occupied when in town.

With her entrance into her new home a new life was to open to her, which was fated to exercise a marked influence over her future destiny.

CHAPTER IV.

FLIRTATION.

THREE months had come and gone since Desirée had been received by the Rathburns. Mrs. Rathburn was kind and affable, Blanche at once accepted her as a sister, while Orville flirted with her as desperately as he could.

Desirée, accustomed to the freedom of manners of ladies from the sunny South and especially those of French descent, received the young man's attentions as her due and repaid them in like coin.

The family were now at their country-seat at Innwood and the various diversions of rural life offered the young couple only too many opportunities to indulge in their pleasant, if dangerous, pastime.

Mr. Rathburn, however, viewed this growing intimacy with alarm, and being alone one day with his son, determined to speak to him about it.

"My dear Orville," said he seriously, "your conduct quite disquiets me."

"My conduct, father?"

"Yes, you no longer gamble; you've dropped your club fellows—"

"But, father—"

"Do not deny it. I have the proofs."

"You are disquieted because I have reformed my evil ways, about which you and mother have often lectured me? Well," he added, knocking the ashes from the cigar he was smoking, "there's nothing irretrievably lost yet—"

"Your friends do not give our lectures the credit of your reform," significantly interrupted his father. "They attribute it rather to Miss Rochfort's stay at our house."

"Oh, if you mean to insinuate that Desirée renders home more agreeable—"

"At the very outset," sternly said Mr. Rathburn, "you could as well call her Miss Rochfort."

"What harm is there to call her by her pretty

French name, as she calls me Orville?" I suppose you also object to my speaking to her in French?

"I don't like it. You tell her a lot of things you would not dare to repeat in English. She is our guest and under my protection; she has won both my friendship and esteem and I very seriously beg you not to make love to her."

"But, how do you know that I do so?"

"My eyes do not deceive me. It cannot be with an honorable intention on your part. You know her position here. You're not the man to marry a poor school-teacher."

"I admit that I flirt with her."

"There's the danger," said his father in a slightly trembling voice; "you begin by flirting with a young and pretty girl, just to pass away the time. Before you are aware of it, caprice becomes love, and love passion."

"How you understand the matter!" exclaimed Orville, with a peculiar twinkle in his eyes; "have you ever passed through the experience?"

"I? Never in my life!" hastily affirmed his father. "But I had a friend who flirted with his sister's piano-teacher as you are doing with Miss Rochfort, and—"

"The result was disastrous," finished Orville.

"Did he marry her?"

"He had contracted a secret marriage with her, but obtained a divorce when his father proved to him that he had good grounds for it."

"Indeed! By the way, father, do you ever go to the theater?"

"Very seldom; why do you ask?"

"I thought so," replied Orville with a smile, "or else you'd have known that when a character in a play tells the story of a friend, without giving that friend's name, it's always the story of his own life."

"You're absurd," retorted the banker, rising and pacing up and down the room. "My friend's name has nothing to do with the matter, but if you must know it, it was Brown."

"Or Jones," added Orville with a laugh.

"How old was he?"

"Twenty-two."

"That excuses him. I'm twenty-seven and—well, I've seen more of the world."

"I hope you will take my words to heart and demean yourself accordingly," said his father as he left the room.

Hardly was he gone when his undutiful son burst into a fit of laughter which threatened to bring on a stroke of apoplexy.

"Who would have believed it?" he gasped. "Will wonders never cease? And so innocent looking too! Oh, my awful dad!"

He was still laughing over the idea which had entered his mind in relation to his father's story, when Blanche and Desirée entered the room.

"What a handsome aspirant for your hand!" exclaimed Desirée, as she placed a basket of flowers on the table.

"He's got red hair," merrily cried Blanche, "but mamma says that won't amount to anything. In fact, they're falling out already."

"Will you ladies please tell me whom you're talking about?"

"The young baron, Victor De Buissey."

"What about him?"

"Mamma has just told me that she expects the visit of his father, the French consul at this port."

"And what has the French consul to do with her?"

"He comes to ask the hand of Blanche for his son," replied Desirée.

"After what I've just heard, I fear this young foreigner will have his trouble for his pains."

"On the contrary," said Blanche, "mamma is enchanted with the idea, and so am I."

"What," cried Desirée, greatly surprised, "you will marry him?"

"Why not? All husbands resemble each other. It's like the wines in the restaurant, only the label is different. Now Baron De Buissey is a mighty fine label, and though, as a Yankee girl, I oughtn't to hanker after a title, yet it would be so grand, you know."

"I thought," interrupted Orville, "that you had already disposed of your affections! It seemed to me that a certain Alfred Barton—"

"Are you interested in him?"

"Not in the slightest."

"Neither am I. He's in California. Let him remain there."

"Oh, if you don't care for him—"

"A fig for boarding-school romance," exclaimed Blanche, with an angry pout.

The truth was that she was more disturbed by this reference to Alfred Barton than she cared to show.

"What do you say, ladies, to a ride on horseback?" suggested Orville.

"Oh, I'm too tired," replied Blanche.

"Then Desirée and I can go alone," declared her brother, not a little gratified that Blanche declined the invitation.

"Your mother says, Orville," said Desirée, "that it is shocking for a young lady to go out horseback riding with a young gentleman."

"And, what do you say?" asked he.

"I see no harm in it. We Southern girls don't regard matters so strictly, and I suppose we're as good as any prim New England miss."

"Better by far," he gallantly replied. "Then you accept the invitation?"

"Of course," she answered with a radiant smile. They left the room arm-in-arm and were soon cantering over the fields.

Left to herself Blanche became absorbed in a solemn reflection on the mutability of all human things in general and her love affairs in particular.

"If Alfred had only remained home," she murmured for the hundredth time, "things might have been different. He had no right to go and exile himself in that horrid California. He'll never come back, I'm sure of it, and I'm not going to become an old maid for the sake of any one man."

She surveyed her handsome form in the mirror and made one or two affected strides through the room.

"Baroness De Buissey," she exclaimed with a toss of her pretty head. "How grand that sounds! Now if Alfred were only a baron, or if that ugly red-haired baron were only as handsome as Alfred—it's perfectly mean that he isn't good-looking. Ah, one can't have all the good things of life done up into one parcel. I suppose it's my fate to be a baroness; I must resign myself to the sacrifice, even if there's a void in my heart which no one can fill—but Alfred."

She sighed deeply and turned to leave the room, when a servant announced Captain Fairchild and a moment later he entered the apartment.

"Good-morning, Miss Blanche!" said he, in answer to her salutation; "may I see Mrs. Rathburn? She has charged me with a commission about which I desire to render an account."

"Yes, the yacht. Did you examine it?"

The vessel is in good condition. It belongs to a wealthy Englishman, at present making the tour of the world. It cost him ten thousand dollars but he would sell it for five thousand. It's an excellent bargain."

"How pleasant it will be to take a sail in it! Mamma is at her toilet, and I doubt whether she will receive you at present, but I'll go and inform her that you are here. I'm sorry that Orville and Desirée are away."

"They are not at Innwood?" asked Harold, in a rather constrained voice.

"Of course they are! They're only out horseback riding, as usual."

"As usual," repeated he to himself.

"They may return, though, before you leave. I'm sure they would be glad to see you."

She left the room to inform her mother of her visitor, and the captain was alone.

He paced up and down the apartment with that quick nervous stride, which showed the internal agitation which he so carefully concealed in the presence of others.

"What presumptuous folly," he exclaimed through his gritted teeth, "for me to expect to ever win her love!"

He stepped to the window and gazed moodily out upon the pleasant landscape spread before him. Instinctively his eyes fastened themselves on a cloud of dust, which rose at a distance up the road.

He watched it drawing nearer and nearer, and something very like an oath escaped his lips, when he discovered the forms of Orville and Desirée approaching the house.

They were slowly walking their horses and seemed engaged in an earnest conversation with each other.

Of course Harold could not distinguish the purport of their words, but he drew his own conclusions from the proximity of their persons, Orville's earnest manner and Desirée's riveted attention.

Unable to endure the sight any longer, he left the window and took up his position in the center of the room. There was an air of fixed determination in his bronzed face and his hands were clenched tightly together.

"I know Mr. Orville too well not to see through his little game," he hoarsely muttered. "But, I shall spoil it. Though I may not mar-

ry Desirée myself, I have the right to save her from my mother's fate."

By this time the riders had reached the courtyard, and Desirée, springing from her steed, ran lightly up the steps and into the room where Harold was.

Flushed and excited by her ride, clad in her riding-habit, her jockey hat set coquettishly on her head and flourishing a jaunty whip, she burst into his presence like a flashing meteor, radiating such dazzling beauty that he was fain to close his eyes.

She started back as she beheld him, and the crimson of her cheeks deepened to a richer hue as she exclaimed:

"Harold, my old friend!"

CHAPTER V.

REVELATION.

He could not receive her otherwise than with a smile, and she, frankly taking both his hands in hers, gayly continued:

"Why do I call you old friend? I only know you since three months; you've been so kind to me during the trip from New Orleans, so paternal—no, not paternal, you're not old enough, so fraternal—"

"I'm too old for that title."

"Neither father nor brother? What shall I call you, then? Uncle?" asked she, gazing at his somber face with a mischievous twinkle in her eye.

"You may call me what you please," he replied, suppressing a sigh.

"Very well, then; uncle it shall be. How is your mother? It is fifteen days since I last saw her."

"She complains of it."

"It is not my fault. Since we came to Innwood, I've not set foot in New York."

"Is your stay with the Rathburns very agreeable?" he asked, nerving himself to broach the subject about which he desired to talk to her.

"Very. There's Blanche whom I dote upon."

"And Orville?"

"A charming fellow."

"Does he not make love to you?"

"Of course he does!" she replied, with provoking coolness. "A fine young gentleman he'd be if he didn't."

Harold bit his lips.

"I ought to forewarn you," he exclaimed, with his usual bluntness, "that he will not marry you."

Desirée burst into a merry peal of laughter.

"Oh, indeed, uncle," she cried, approaching him. "You must have a pretty opinion of me. Do you believe I want to get married?"

He started back and gazed at her keenly, while his own face blushed as red as hers ought to have done.

"But," stammered he, "if you don't want to get married, what in Heaven's name do you want?"

"I want to amuse myself, that's all," she replied, still laughing. "Now, don't you go and put a wet blanket on all my fun."

"I fear you take too much pleasure in your stay here."

"Isn't it natural that I should? It is the last oasis in the desert of my future. When I leave here, it is only to enter into a life of servitude."

"The sooner you depend upon yourself for your livelihood the better it will be for your pride," he gravely said; "you are here in a false position."

His seriousness affected her.

"Find me another," she soberly said.

"You give me leave?"

"I beg you."

The entrance of Blanche cut short the interview, and after hearing that Mrs. Rathburn would consult her husband as to the purchase of the yacht, the captain took his leave and returned to New York.

When he entered the presence of his mother, she was quick to detect the general air of dejection which pervaded him.

"Harold," she said, affectionately laying her hand on his shoulder and gazing anxiously in his face, "you have been to see Desirée."

"How do you know?" he asked, flushing.

"A mother's eye is keen. It's not the first time I've noticed that every visit to her brings you back melancholy and sad. Your downcast looks, your taciturn manner, the flush which at the mention of her name rises to your cheek, speak to me in language I can well interpret. You love her."

"Yes, I do," he ardently exclaimed. "The passion I ridiculed and belittled has, at last,

found a resting-place in my heart. I worship the very ground she treads upon."

"It is an honorable passion. Why, then, should it make you so sad and melancholy?"

"Because," he gloomily replied, "my love is hopeless."

"I cannot possibly be mistaken in her. I am sure she would be proud to become—"

"My niece," he bitterly interrupted. "She calls me uncle. That's enough. Do not deceive yourself, mother; if Desirée has any inclination for any one, it is not for me, but for young Orville Rathburn, who is making love to her."

"Who told you all this?"

"She herself. She knows that he will not marry her, and has desired me to procure a situation for her, so that she can leave the family. I will very likely obtain for her the position of French teacher in the family of Sir Edward Forster, the wealthy Englishman, whose yacht I have for sale. He is about returning to England with his family."

"Desirée would be obliged to leave New York."

The thought that he himself was to exile the object of his affections was a bitter one to Harold, yet he felt that it was his duty to do so.

"She will," he finally replied, with an effort. "But I prefer that than to see her remain where she is. I fear the rascality of this young dandy of an Orville."

"But, Desirée is thoroughly honorable," warmly asserted his mother.

"To doubt it would be to insult her," he replied, "but that may not prevent her from falling a victim to the schemes of men, more infamous than the vilest criminals. Oh, for the pleasure of crushing one of them!"

As he spoke, a fit of rage took possession of him. His face became purple; his form quivered with passion; his eyes shot forth lurid gleams or hate.

His mother was greatly alarmed at this sudden outburst.

"You frighten me," she anxiously exclaimed, throwing her arms around his neck. "I have never seen you so angry."

"Because, for your sake," he violently answered, "I crushed within my bosom the bitter, bitter hate I bear against one man."

"What man, for Heaven's sake?" she implored.

"You ask me?" cried he. "I did not intend that you should look into my soul; but this poor girl's peril has aroused all my indignation against the man whom I hate without knowing."

"Harold, you forget he is your father!"

"He has forgotten that I am his son."

Mrs. Fairchild became deathly pale. A cold perspiration started on her forehead. She wrung her hands in the intensest agony. Her lips trembled convulsively. Several times she attempted to speak but her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. At last, with a supreme effort, she uttered the terrible, fatal words:

"What if he did not believe it?"

Had a thunderbolt descended from a clear sky, Harold could not have been more astonished than at his mother's frenzied ejaculation.

"He did not believe it?" he stammered.

Mrs. Fairchild sunk on the sofa and burying her face in her hands, burst into tears.

"A hundred times the words have trembled on my lips," she sobbed; "a hundred times, I cowardly choked them back. Your father was an honorable man, a man of heart, whom I have not the right to leave under the weight of your contempt and hate. And, however painful this explanation may be—"

"I do not wish to hear it," eagerly interrupted her son. "It is useless, since I don't know the man, nor wish to know him."

"He is not the guilty one."

"Who then?" he asked, deeply moved.

"I!"

"You!"

"Yes, I—and his father," she continued, slowly rising to her feet. "I, who, by my imprudence, gave grounds to an odious suspicion; his father, who cruelly took advantage thereof. You remember your uncle?"

"I do. The good man who, after so much trouble, discovered your place of refuge and cared for us as long as he lived."

"He was not my brother, save by adoption, but he was always like the best of brothers to me. Nothing more, believe me!"

She gazed pleadingly at him as she spoke.

"I do believe you, mother," he sincerely replied.

"But your grandfather believed otherwise," she continued, in a low tone, "and so instructed his son. While awaiting an acknowledgment

of our marriage, I was served with the papers in a divorce suit. Accompanying them was a letter as brief as it was cruel. 'His father,' he said, 'had opened his eyes for him.'

"But you defended the suit, you confounded the calumniators?"

Mrs. Fairchild lowered her eyes and almost inaudibly responded:

"No."

"No?"

"Forgive me," she murmured. "I listened only to my pride. I cared but to die. On the water's brink the thought of you restrained me from the fatal plunge, and I wandered far, far away until I sunk exhausted in the streets of the village where you were born. Oh, the horror of that aimless journey! Heaven alone knows what I suffered then. And when you were born, when I realized that I ought to have defended myself, at least for your sake, I recognized that it was too late. I was a divorced wife; I had been condemned by my silence."

A gleam of infinite tenderness came into Harold's eyes.

"You did right to keep silent, mother," he fondly exclaimed. "It was not your duty, but his, to demand an explanation. But, don't tell me any more that he is a man of heart. Such a man does not condemn without a hearing, does not accept calumny as proof. Let us drop the subject," he added, taking up his hat; "it is as painful for me as for you."

"You are going away?"

"I expect the vessel which brings Alfred Barton home. He has bravely acquitted himself of his mission. Henceforth, he shall remain in New York, my right hand, my other self."

"He deserves his success."

"I go to meet him at the pier and will bring him home to dine."

He embraced his mother and left the room.

"He is angry with me," she murmured when she was alone, "for defending his father. He hates and will never forgive him. He shall never know his name."

CHAPTER VI.

CRUSHED.

THE Baron De Buissey belonged to that class of the French nobility which, though it can show a long line of titled descent, has very little to boast of in the way of this world's goods.

Unable to sustain himself in Paris, in a condition suitable to his rank, he had accepted the post of consul in this city, in the hope of propping the fallen fortunes of his house by a marriage between his son and one of the wealthy American heiresses whom all titled, but impecunious Frenchmen deem their legitimate prey.

He had reason to suppose that the banking-house of Rathburn was one of the most solid in Wall street; he knew that Blanche would receive one hundred thousand dollars on the day of her marriage, from her mother's estate, and was the prospective heiress of half of her father's millions. Besides, she was young, beautiful and well-educated. Mrs. Rathburn's vanity greatly aided him in his design. Mr. Rathburn, at first, was strenuously opposed to the match. He had not forgotten Alfred, and openly declared his preference for the young clerk as a son-in-law, but, as Blanche, infected by her mother's ambitious dreams, declared her willingness to marry the young baron, he was forced to give a reluctant consent.

To obtain this victory over her husband Mrs. Rathburn was obliged to sacrifice her pet whim of buying a yacht, as the banker had peremptorily declared that he could not afford to purchase it, hinting, indeed, that his financial affairs were not at all as prosperous as they seemed, and that, were a crash to happen on exchange he gravely doubted his ability to weather it.

In fact the impending crash came sooner than any one had expected it.

All through half of that September month the fever of speculation had been raging with desperate fury in Wall street. On the morning of the eighteenth the bubble burst and the panic came.

Jay Cooke & Co. were the first to suspend payment; other firms and banks followed in rapid succession and the country was plunged into an era of depression and hard times, from which it was years in recovering.

Mr. Rathburn was sitting in his office, an utterly crushed man.

He held about one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars of their paper which he had discounted and which was now seemingly worthless. He had intended to cover certain obligations of his own with this paper and now it was lost. Unless he could borrow a like sum, and

that, too, immediately, he would have to declare himself a bankrupt.

But who was to lend it to him? Almost everybody was more or less affected by the panic. Each person was distrustful of his neighbor. No one knew how many more firms would be dragged into ruin.

In despair Mr. Rathburn sent his clerks to all his business friends. They all returned with the same story of excuses and empty-handed.

There seemed no possible mode of escape.

The firm of Rathburn, which had stood so long and so proudly among the financial landmarks of Wall street, which had weathered every storm and never failed was at last to go down in bankruptcy and ruin.

No wonder the poor old man bowed his head with shame and wept bitter tears.

An equally crushed man, though for a different reason, was Alfred Barton.

Through the two long years of his absence in California he had been true to his love for Blanche.

The remembrance of her dear face had been the only consolation in his exile; her letters were guarded next to his heart as though they were priceless jewels.

When her correspondence became less and less frequent, and finally altogether ceased, he invented all sorts of excuses for her, but never doubted her love.

To render himself more worthy of her he had worked and labored with an assiduity and industry, which, he knew, would be amply rewarded by his employer.

Captain Fairchild had held out to him an interest in his business as a prize for the faithful accomplishment of his mission, and to obtain that, for Blanche's sake, were the aim and object of all his endeavors.

At last his work was finished, and when the ship arrived at New York, with what proud joy and heart beating high with hope, he stood on the deck!

The two years' sojourn in California had browned his features and made him more manly-looking. Never before had he appeared so handsome.

Harold welcomed him as he stepped off the ship, and complimented him on his appearance. He also gratified him with the information that he was no longer his clerk but his partner and co-adviser.

He would fain have hurried at once to Blanche, but his business duties kept him engaged the whole day, and in the evening he had to dine with Harold and his mother.

Next day, however, he rose early and clad himself in his best array. He learned that the Rathburns had returned to their city residence and determined to visit them and boldly ask the hand of Blanche in marriage.

After spending several hours at his toilet and having finally satisfied his fastidious taste, he was about to sally forth to learn his fate when his landlady brought him the morning paper.

He was about to impatiently throw it aside, when he caught sight of a paragraph which blighted all his fond hopes.

It was the announcement of Blanche's engagement to Baron Victor De Buissey.

He sunk into a chair, utterly overwhelmed.

He felt no rage at the fickleness of the girl he so deeply loved. Do what she would, he could not be angry with her. But, the poignancy of his disappointment pierced his heart to the core, and, strong man that he was, he wept like a child.

It was in this condition that Harold found him.

"Hello," he ejaculated, in surprise, "what's this? In tears?"

"Captain Fairchild," said the young man, rising and grasping his hand, "you've been like a father to me. You will grieve when I am gone; but I cannot help it. I am too unhappy to live."

He was about to pass out of the room when Harold forcibly drew him back.

"Here, hold on!" he cried. "What are you going to do?"

"Commit suicide," gloomily replied Alfred.

"Is all New York gone crazy?" exclaimed the captain, with a loud laugh. "You're the third man I've met this morning who's going to take a plunge into another world. I let the two first go, for two fools less on earth will do no harm. But you're my friend, and that's another matter. Let's hear your story. Are you, too, caught in the panic?"

"If it were only a loss of money," said the young man, "I would laugh, not weep. My whole future is blighted."

"That is pretty strong language for a young

man whom I have just taken into partnership," smilingly retorted Harold.

"What care I for partnerships or fortune, if Blanche, I mean Miss Rathburn—"

"Oh, ho," interrupted the captain. "That's the way the wind blows, is it! You love Blanche Rathburn?"

"I do."

"And have you any reason to suppose that she returns your affection, never mind whether she's engaged or not?"

Alfred silently handed him his package of letters.

Harold glanced at them.

"Very well. Take my word for it, she will not marry the young Baron De Buissey."

"You bid me to still hope?" exclaimed Alfred joyfully.

"Of course. I promise to dance at your wedding. Let me arrange it. You already have a powerful factor in your favor."

"What is that?"

"Her father's impending bankruptcy."

CHAPTER VII.

HAROLD'S FATHER.

LEAVING Alfred in much better spirits than he had found him Harold returned home to inform his mother of the extraordinary news of the day.

Desirée happened to be there on a visit.

"What is the matter, Harold?" asked his mother as he entered the room; "you look excited!"

"And no wonder," he replied. "There's a perfect panic in Wall street."

"A panic!" exclaimed Desirée.

"Jay Cooke and Co. have failed!"

"I expected no less."

"Thanks to your foresight, I am, perhaps, the only one unaffected; but others were not so prudent and I am especially sorry for one."

"Who?"

"Mr. Rathburn will be obliged to suspend payment."

"Oh Heaven!" cried Desirée.

"The unhappy man," murmured Mrs. Fairchild sinking into a seat.

"Did you know nothing of it, Miss Rochfort?" asked Harold.

"Not a word, nor any of the family either. Poor folks!"

"How much did Jay Cooke and Co. owe him?" asked Mrs. Fairchild, her voice trembling with agitation.

"One hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars."

"And must he for that become bankrupt?"

"It seems so. The poor fellow is knocking at all doors but he won't raise a cent. His very attempt to do so robs him of all credit, for it discloses a condition of affairs which people were far from suspecting."

"But he has friends," declared the young girl.

"Who are all more or less touched by the crash, or will feign to be so, too happy for a pretext to refuse so risky a loan," bitterly retorted Mrs. Fairchild.

"He will at least have one friend," exclaimed Desirée, generously. "My plantation is sold. I have five thousand dollars—"

"You intend to offer that?" ejaculated Mrs. Fairchild, fondly embracing her; "how good you are!"

"It will be but a drop of water," declared Harold.

"Perhaps," said Desirée, her whole features glorified by the nobleness of her purpose. "Drops of water make rivers."

The captain gazed keenly at her and in a voice, the bitterness of which he could not entirely conceal, said:

"The honor of this family lies near your heart."

"It does," she generously replied, misinterpreting his meaning. "They welcomed me in my loneliness; I will not abandon them in their distress, and if I'm the only one to come to their aid, I, their friend of yesterday, so much the worse for the others."

She put on her hat and bade them a hasty adieu. Harold wished to detain her but his mother called him back.

"Let her go, Harold," she said. "It is so good to see a noble action. Besides, it will cost her nothing. Mr. Rathburn will be saved by another than her."

"By another," he indifferently asked. "Who?" She passed her arms around his neck and bending her head to his whispered in his ear:

"You!"

"I!"

"Yes."

"Oh, no, a thousand times no!" he decisively

said. "I haven't any one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars to throw out of the window."

"I ask them of you," begged his mother.

He looked at her in strange surprise. He knew that she was the last person in the world to take any unnecessary risks in business, especially where the lending of money was concerned, and now to ask him to bolster up a bankrupt was something he never expected from her. He saw that she was greatly agitated and avoided his glance. There must be some powerful motive for her request. He wondered what it could be.

"But, what interest do you take in this man," he asked, "whom you do not even know?"

She seemed to be greatly embarrassed by this question.

"Need I know him?" she at length replied. "Desirée's affection for him proves that he deserves the sympathy of all honest people. Shall we be less generous than this poor girl?"

"I'm not enamored of Mr. Orville Rathburn," he crossly replied.

"You wrong her," said his mother, reproachfully. "I'm sure her generous impulse was entirely unselfish."

"I grant it. But if I yield to your whim Mr. Rathburn's failure would only be delayed not avoided. With a son brought up to a life of luxurious idleness, a wife whose extravagance is boundless, his position would always be as precarious as in the past and more so, since the world now knows of it and he has lost his credit."

"That is true," she pensively admitted.

For some moments she paced up and down the room in deep deliberation.

Suddenly a thought seemed to strike her and turning to her son, she continued:

"He must not be saved by halves. He needs a strong will in his business and you will put one in—yours. You must become his special partner."

"I become the partner of that blockhead?" exclaimed Harold, more than ever astonished.

"It is the only way of giving you the right to speak firmly in his household and to put things to order."

"But, that's the height of madness! Money—well, I might be induced to give that, but my time, my services—never!"

This unusual obstinacy influenced, no doubt, by his latent jealousy of Orville Rathburn, put his mother to her wits' end.

There was left to her but one means of forcing his obedience. Rising to her full height she exclaimed in a commanding voice:

"It must be. I wish it. *It is your duty.*"

A long silence followed the words.

Harold stood stock-still and gazed fixedly at her.

This time she did not flinch but returned the glance as steadfastly as she had received it.

He was satisfied.

"*He is my father,*" he slowly said.

"He is!" she bravely replied.

The secret was out at last. The object of his life-long hate was revealed to him. And, strange as it may appear, now that he knew the author of his being, he could not hate him. His long business and friendly intercourse with Mr. Rathburn had implanted in his heart a respect for him which could not so easily be eradicated.

"I will do all you want," he said, kissing her hand; "I will guard his honor as if it were my heritage."

"Thanks," she gratefully exclaimed.

"But I will not tell him that I am his son," he continued. "Not even to him do I want to disclose your secret."

"Nor do I wish you to do so."

They seated themselves on the sofa and holding each other by the hand confidentially discussed their plan of saving Mr. Rathburn from ruin.

"Once his partner," asked he, "how am I to prevent his coming here?"

"Have we not each of us our own rooms on different floors?"

"He will ask to be introduced to you."

"You will tell him that I receive no one."

"But if he meets you, by chance, while coming to see me?"

"He will not recognize me. You well understand that I assured myself of that fact before letting you establish yourself here. When the growth of your business obliged you to open an office in New York I arranged it so as to meet Mr. Rathburn."

"And he did not know you?"

"He had not seen me for thirty-five years. I had changed in features as well as in name."

"I will go at once to the bank," said Harold,

arising, "to draw one hundred and twenty thousand dollars."

"One hundred and twenty-five thousand."

"True enough. We must reimburse Desirée. Dear girl, her action was a noble one, and you, mother," he added, embracing her, "are an angel."

"Heaven be praised," fervently murmured Mrs. Fairchild when she was alone.

And where was Orville all this time, when his father's gray hairs were bowing beneath the storm?

At home sleeping, not exactly the sleep of the just, but the profound slumber of one who, on the previous evening, had been on a racket.

He had come home with the family from a banquet given at the residence of the baron in honor of the betrothal of the young baron to Blanche, and bidden them all good-night, but an hour later, when all in the house were asleep, he had arisen, softly opened the door of his room and crept on tip-toe out of the house.

Once in the street he breathed a sigh of relief and directed his footsteps to his club.

His arrival there was hailed by his comrades with every demonstration of delight.

"Behold the prodigal son returned," cried one.

"Let us kill the fatted calf in his honor," added another.

"It's three months since he's been here!"

"Orville, old fellow, if I don't intrude, how's the handsome Southerness?"

"It is for her sake that I'm here to-night," said he, replying to the last speaker.

"Indeed," ejaculated all the gilded youths, in a chorus. "You don't mean to introduce her here!"

"My coming here is an act worthy of a knight of chivalry."

"Explain, explain," they said.

"You all know my patriarchal habits since she has been an inmate of my father's house. Now it seems that Miss Rochfort was somewhat compromised by my very virtuous resolutions. Now, you know I'm not that kind of a man—"

He was interrupted by a shout of ironical laughter.

"So, to give the lie to calumny," he concluded, "I'm here among you, boys, to make a night of it."

"Hurrah!" they shouted, "we'll have a jolly time."

Orville was the hero of the hour. He was feasted like a prince; champagne flowed in streams; speeches were made in his honor; songs were sung and a jolly good time had all around.

That the green table was not forgotten was a matter of course, and Orville conscientiously left two hundred and fifty dollars in the hands of the banker to pay for his night's entertainment.

It was five o'clock in the morning when, with rather unsteady steps and dizzy head, he reached home. He observed the same caution in entering his room as he had in leaving it, and went to sleep, flattering himself that his little escapade was unnoticed.

Though his wine-heated brain conjured up many fantastic visions during that sleep, he did not dream what an influence this very escapade was to have on Desirée's future fate.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL.

WHEN Desirée left Mrs. Fairchild's full of her generous resolve to assist the banker with all the means in her possession, she proceeded directly to his office. There she was informed that he had gone home. On her arrival at the house, however, she found that Mr. Rathburn had not yet come home. Mrs. Rathburn was closeted with her lawyer, while Blanche and Orville, who had just arisen, were amusing themselves in the garden, utterly oblivious of the storm impending over the household.

She did not wish to inform them, and yet the protracted absence of Mr. Rathburn filled her with great alarm. She was about to leave the house in search for him, when he entered, in a state of complete dejection.

He did not perceive her presence in the room and crossing over to the settee sunk into it, utterly overwhelmed.

Desirée watched him for a few moments in silence, and then slowly approaching him, sympathetically asked:

"Did you obtain it?"

"What," he moodily asked, raising his head.

"What you were seeking. I know the misfortune which has happened to you."

"Is it known here?" he anxiously asked.

"Not yet."

"I have found nothing," he despairingly muttered.

"Then I've been more fortunate than you," she said with a smile. "I've found five thousand dollars. There they are."

She drew the money, which she had taken from her bureau, from her pocket and handed it to him.

"From whom have you obtained this?" he asked, without taking the bills.

"I am forbidden to name the person," she replied, turning her head aside.

"But, how am I to give a receipt?"

"It is not asked for; confidence is reposed in you."

"How will I pay it back?"

"Very simply; through my hands."

Mr. Rathburn had been narrowly watching her changing features—as he asked these questions. He now tremblingly rose to his feet, and in a voice quivering with emotion said:

"These five thousand dollars will not save me. They will be of more use to the donor than to me—for she is too generous not to be poor."

Desirée made a gesture of dissent.

"Thanks, my dear child," he brokenly continued, taking her hand in his; "your offer has done me good. It has saved me from losing all faith in humanity. Keep your little fortune; I do not need it."

The young girl was obliged to pocket her money, which she did with a sigh of disappointment.

"I will address myself to Mrs. Rathburn," he more hopefully added.

"To your wife?"

"She is rich. It is, however, her separate estate and I have until now hesitated to ask her."

"Courage," said Desirée. "Under the circumstances she cannot refuse."

Mrs. Rathburn, at this moment, entered the room. Her flushed, excited manner, the angry flash in her eyes, and her determined step, plainly evinced what was the nature of the important communication she had just received from her lawyer.

"Well, sir," she shrilly exclaimed, advancing directly to her trembling husband. "Was I right or wrong when I urged you to surrender the management of your business to Orville?"

Foreseeing the domestic tempest, Desirée was about to slip from the room but Mrs. Rathburn peremptorily ordered her to remain.

"We would not be where we are," she continued, "had you taken my advice."

"How would Orville have escaped the panic any more than I?" humbly asked her husband.

"Let that pass," she loftily retorted. "I would have too great an advantage over you and it is not my fashion to strike people when they're down. I only reproach you for one thing," she added, suddenly assuming a kindly tone, "and that is for not coming to me at once instead of going to strangers, making our deplorable condition known to all New York and forcing your wife into the position of a woman without head or heart, from whom you expected neither advice nor assistance."

"What did I tell you?" whispered Desirée to him.

"I was wrong; I acknowledge it," joyfully exclaimed the banker, "but, Desirée is my witness that I was on the point of asking you for the assistance which you so generously offer me."

"I?" cried his wife, in the greatest surprise. "I offer you nothing at all. I would have done so this morning, but now, what good would it do? Your revelations have discredited the firm. It's no longer worth the cost of its rescue, as my lawyer has just told me."

"Then you wish me to fail?" asked her husband, sadly. "I will die with shame and mortification."

"I'm more ashamed of it than you," she retorted. "Such a miserable, petty bankruptcy. Nothing left—"

"But honor," timidly suggested Desirée.

"That's not in question, miss," snapped the irate lady.

"If you remain rich while he is in debt," firmly said the young girl, "your wealth, not his failure, will dishonor him."

"Such notions of honor, my dear, are somewhat out of date," retorted Mrs. Rathburn, with a grim smile. "That happens every day in New York, and to act otherwise would be a piece of folly for which no one would thank you."

"Except your husband and his creditors."

"Advisers are not payers," dryly rejoined the lady.

"She has offered me the whole of her fortune," generously declared the banker.

"And I still offer it to you."

"Is that a bid for a marriage?" thought Orville's mother. "That's all very nice, miss," she said, aloud, "but I am a mother before all else; it is my children's money that is asked of me; I refuse it."

"Refuse my sister's, but give mine, I beg you."

The words were uttered by Orville, who, a moment before, had entered the room.

He had heard of his father's misfortune, and, like a sharp acid, the news had eaten away the superficial coating of frivolity and selfishness which covered his heart, and revealed the pure gold beneath. All his inherent manhood asserted itself in the noble ejaculation.

"You, too?" scornfully retorted his mother.

"You alone can save us," urged the young man, "and I do not understand why you should hesitate—"

"To throw what is left into the abyss opened by your father?" she interrupted, scornfully.

"Do not accuse him."

"Whom, then, should I accuse?" she angrily exclaimed. "Imprudent in parting with his money, he is too timid to take advantage of his own failure."

The young man gazed at his grief-stricken father, and his heart swelled with filial love.

"His imprudence," he exclaimed, in ringing tones, "is a confidence which was shared by all the bankers in Wall street; his timidity I call honesty—a regard for our honor. Cheer up, dear father," he fondly added, approaching him; "your children are with you."

"My son, my son!" cried Mr. Rathburn, throwing his arms around the young man's neck and weeping tears of emotion and joy.

"Good Orville!" exclaimed Desirée, wiping her eyes.

Mrs. Rathburn bit her lips and stamped her feet with vexation.

"If we grow sentimental, all is lost," she declared. "Sentiment is out of place in business," as my lawyer says. "Be all against me, if you wish; I will think for all, since I'm the only one who hasn't lost head. You'll thank me one of these days."

"But, mother," implored Orville—

"It's my last word," she decisively retorted.

"Captain Fairchild," announced the servant.

"A visit at this moment?" irritably exclaimed Orville.

Harold stood on the threshold of the room, greatly moved at the sorrowful picture before him.

"Excuse me, sir," said Orville, approaching him, "but you intrude upon a family council."

"I'm not out of place," slowly replied he, with a hidden meaning which the others could not perceive. "I understand, sir," he added, addressing the banker, "that you need one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. I bring that sum to you."

The unexpected announcement produced various effects on his hearers.

Mr. Rathburn was so overcome with surprise that he could only stammer forth:

"What, sir—"

His wife breathed a sigh of great relief, and murmured:

"What luck!"

Orville, as jealous of Harold as the latter was of him, could not help frowning and muttering:

"He's the last man I would wish to be under obligations to."

Desirée remained silent, but she gazed at Harold with a look of delight which would have sent him into the seventh heaven of bliss had he noticed it. On board the ship he had appeared to her as a hero; now he assumed, in her eyes, the grander, more sublime character of a guardian angel.

As soon as the banker had recovered sufficiently to speak connectedly, he exclaimed:

"You, sir, who owe me nothing, come to my assistance when those on whom I had the right to most rely, abandon me! May Heaven bless you; you save my life!"

"Your life?" ejaculated Orville.

"Do you believe that I would have survived my bankruptcy?" asked his father with quiet dignity.

"He is indeed a man of heart," murmured Harold.

"What gratitude I owe you, sir," began the banker—

"It's not a question of gratitude," coldly interrupted Harold. "I've not come so much to render you a favor as to make a business proposition."

"I prefer that," muttered Orville.

"You are none the less my preserver," gratefully exclaimed Mr. Rathburn.

"All the better," smilingly said Harold.

"Here is my proposition: I believe that the banking-house of Rathburn can be re-established, and I offer not to become your creditor, but your special partner. How does that suit you?"

"How does it suit me?" delightedly cried the banker; "your money is nothing compared to your co-operation. Your name alone will suffice to regain my lost credit. And your energy, your experience—"

"There, there," good-naturedly interrupted Harold. "The matter is settled then?"

"Done!"

The two men, father and son, shook hands.

"Allow all the family to add their sincere thanks to those of Mr. Rathburn," graciously said the banker's wife.

"I hope, sir," said Orville, coldly, "that the copartnership will be as much to your advantage as it is to ours."

"It is in that hope that I make it," replied Harold, in the same tone. "Let us go to your study, Mr. Rathburn; we have several things now to arrange."

"Permit me to show you the way," said the banker, passing before him.

"Are you satisfied?" whispered Harold to Desirée, as he passed her.

"Yes, indeed," she ardently responded.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BARON'S DILEMMA.

"WHAT unexpected luck!" ejaculated Mrs. Rathburn, after her husband and Harold had left the room.

"And on the brink of what misfortune we were without suspecting it," added Desirée. "When I think of Mr. Rathburn's despairing resolve—"

"Do you think I'd have let it come to that?" the lady hastened to assure her. "Poor old man! I had exhausted all my energy in the cruel refusal. No matter now! All's well that ends well—but, mercy, I had forgotten! All's not ended yet."

"What now?" asked Orville.

"Your sister's marriage."

"You're afraid it will fall through?"

"Ah, well! The position of your father's firm is greatly diminished."

"It will be re-established."

"I hope so, but, between a banking-house which needs to be propped and one in full prosperity like that of Travers's—"

"You're afraid," laughed Orville, "that the baron will break his son's engagement to Blanche and turn his attention to the fair daughter of our business rival? I believe he's too conceited to draw back on a mere question of money."

"Mrs. Rathburn means, I take it," diplomatically suggested Desirée, "that there might be some indelicacy in holding the baron to his word."

"But I don't mean any such thing," declared that lady.

"Then you are wrong," warmly said her son.

"Under the circumstances, the proper thing to do is to give him back his word, whatever the consequences may be. Father must go to the office of the French consul, and the sooner the better."

"The Baron De Buissey," announced the servant.

"Already," said Desirée, with a peculiar smile.

The baron had got wind of Mr. Rathburn's misfortune and had hurried in hot haste to save himself and his son before it was too late.

He, however, entered the room, with an affectation of the profoundest sympathy.

"Ah, my poor friends," he dolorously exclaimed, "what have I learned? May I speak before Miss—"

"Rochfort," completed Orville, "yes; she's one of the family."

"So they say," muttered the baron, with a grin. "Believe me," he continued, aloud, "that no one more deeply sympathizes than I in the misfortune which has befallen you—I ought to say befallen us, for my poor son is in despair. He so loved Miss Blanche."

"Loved!" repeated Orville. "Then he no longer loves her?"

"I do not say that," deprecatingly replied the baron, "but you understand—"

"So well," haughtily interrupted the young man, "that my father was just about to go to you to release your son from his engagement to my sister. I regret that you should have forestalled us."

"I expected no less from your delicacy," replied the baron, with a bow.

"But, we had the right to expect more from your courtesy," coldly retorted Orville.

"Permit me," began the baron—

"In a word," interrupted Mrs. Rathburn, angered by this exhibition of sordid meanness, "the engagement is broken."

"Alas! madam," exclaimed the nobleman, with an affectation of humility, as a father—

"I thought you were above pecuniary considerations, sir?" sneered the lady.

"If it were only a matter of money," he grandiloquently exclaimed, "your ruin would rather strengthen our alliance. I saw only one dark spot in the union of our two families, the disproportion between our fortunes. No, no, madam; if I draw back it is only on account of the bankruptcy."

"What bankruptcy?" she coolly asked.

"Apparently Mr. Rathburn's."

"But, sir," proudly declared Orville, "there's not the slightest likelihood of it."

"What?" cried the baron, in consternation, "is not your father on the point of suspending payment?"

"By no means," affirmed Mrs. Rathburn; "we will pay, to-morrow, on demand."

The nobleman was thunderstruck. Had he been too hasty in his conclusions? Had he deliberately thrown away the fortune which was already in his grasp? He, already, began to regret his hasty action, when a solution of the mystery presented itself to his mind.

"I'm delighted to hear it," he hypocritically exclaimed.

"That's evident," ironically murmured Desirée.

"A great sacrifice for you, madam—great, very great," he continued.

"What sacrifice?" asked Mrs. Rathburn; "I know of none."

"You're not going to rescue the firm?" he exclaimed with a stupefied air. "Who then?"

"Captain Fairchild," replied Orville, who becomes my father's special partner in the sum of one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars."

"The deuce!" with a grimace; "but only a special partner—not generally liable and responsible?"

"Ah, still a question of money!" was Desirée's sarcastic remark. "And you a nobleman!"

He turned to her with an elaborate bow and said:

"A nobleman, my pretty mocker. Yes—one who never breaks his pledged word. The young Baron De Buissey is betrothed to Miss Blanche and will keep his troth. With my son it is not a question of money."

"Ah, baron, exclaimed Mrs. Rathburn, delighted that her pet scheme was not to fail, after all. "Now I find you again—"

"I cannot tell you, my good friends, my dear relatives," he hypocritically interrupted, "how happy. I especially came this morning to say that I wish to have you all accompany me this evening to the theater, where I have engaged the large proscenium box. A little relaxation after your troubles will do you all good. I'll take no refusal," and bidding them *au revoir* in the most elaborate style he took his departure.

"I don't like the way the matter's been patched up," he mused, when he had gained the street. "Had Captain Fairchild been a general partner, all right; but a special one! I won't risk it! The Traverses would jump at my son. They've got an eligible daughter. I'll break this confounded match, and that pretty, saucy Miss Rochfort will furnish me with a reason."

CHAPTER X.

TEMPTATION.

THAT evening, true to his promise, the baron entertained the Rathburn family in his box at the theater. He was especially attentive to Mrs. Rathburn, and in his cunning way drew from her all about the relation of Desirée to Orville. After the performance was over they returned directly to Innwood.

The next day Orville suggested to his sister and Desirée that they should engage in a game called "Stag and Hounds."

"What's that?" asked the two girls in concert.

"It's a mock hunt," he explained. "The party go out on horseback. One of the riders is the stag. He is given five minutes' start. He has a bag full of variously colored papers which he scatters about while galloping; that's his trail. His object is to put the hunt at fault, you understand?"

"Splendid!" cried Blanche. "Let me be the stag."

"Then Desirée and I will be the hunters. I'm willing."

"And so am I," assented she.

The papers and bags were soon obtained and the ladies having put on their riding costumes, the party set out for the woods.

Having found a spot convenient for a start, Blanche took the papers and darted ahead.

"Catch me, if you can!" she cried, with a burst of merry laughter, as her horse disappeared with her in the thick foliage.

Allowing her the full five minutes, Desirée and Orville started off in pursuit.

Owing to the different speeding qualities of their steeds the hunters soon became separated and while she conscientiously tried to run down the mock stag, he devoted himself to the more agreeable task of hunting his fellow huntress.

He finally came up to her in a secluded portion of the forest where she was walking her tired horse.

"Haven't you found the stag, Orville?" she asked as he approached.

"No; did you?"

"I've completely lost the trail."

"If I haven't caught the stag," he said, guiding his horse close up to hers, "I've accomplished the object I had in mind when I suggested the game."

"So, then, you had a hidden purpose?" she asked.

"I confess it," he answered, his voice becoming low and tender; "can't you guess it?"

She burst into a merry laugh.

"Becoming sentimental again," she mischievously exclaimed.

And giving her steed a tap with her whip, she galloped away from him.

"But, Desirée, listen," he cried, starting after her.

A broad drainage ditch, partially filled with water, extended across her path. She encouraged her horse with a shout and the noble animal crossed it with a bound.

"Well, what do you want?" she saucily exclaimed, reining in her steed on the other side of the canal.

She knew that Orville's horse, a much inferior animal, would never be able to leap the ditch.

"To tell you," he replied, attempting to force his stubborn nag across the dividing chasm, "that—Get up, you confounded brute!"

"Are you addressing me?" she demurely asked.

"No, my stupid horse—I love—"

"Your horse?"

"No, *you*!" he replied tugging away at his animal with all his might.

This declaration, intermingled, as it was, with objurgations against his horse, struck Desirée as so supremely ridiculous that she was obliged to hold her sides with laughter.

"I wish you would address your remarks to one object at a time," she said, as soon as she could gain breath to talk.

"I mean to do so," he answered—"to you."

"No, to your horse," she retorted; "that is of more importance."

And giving her bridle a pull, she galloped away leaving him in his uncomfortable position, in a humor not to be described.

Two hours later Blanche came riding home, in great glee, at the thought she had completely outwitted her pursuers.

She was, however, taken quite aback when she encountered in the parlor, Desirée, clad in ordinary costume.

"What," she exclaimed, "you home and have already changed your dress?"

"I lost the clew," she quietly replied. "I gave up the hunt and returned by the shortest route."

"And Orville?"

"I left him on the border of a ditch in a discussion with his horse," she said, with a faint smile; "I don't know if they've come to an agreement yet."

"And I believed myself pursued," exclaimed Blanche disappointedly. "I wasn't even followed!"

She left the parlor, repairing to her own room to change her dress.

"How thankful I am to Captain Fairchild," muttered Desirée when she was alone, "for promising—At last!"

The ejaculation was directed to Orville, who at that moment entered the room.

"I'm very angry!" he exclaimed, in an irritated tone.

"Against your horse?" she laughingly asked.

"No, against you."

"What is my crime?" she inquired.

"You took advantage of my position to make fun of me."

"Frankly, I had to laugh; I couldn't help it. You were so ridiculous."

She began to laugh again at the mere remembrance of the episode at the ditch.

"A balky horse is not an unusual sight."

"No, but a ditch cutting a declaration of love in two, a cavalier interrupting his tender avowals with a 'get up, you confounded brute,' and the object of his ardent affections on the other side laughing at him—confess, my dear Orville, that your unlucky declaration will stick in that ditch."

Her eyes sparkled so mischievously, her cheeks were so rosy red, her lips so dewy, her silvery laugh so tantalizing, that the young man completely lost his head.

"What if that declaration should leave that ditch?" he fervently asked.

"I've a magic formula to conjure it back again," she merrily replied.

"My position was somewhat ridiculous, I confess, but my sentiments are not, because they are sincere and—"

"Get up there, you confounded brute," interrupted she, with the most provoking coolness. "Continue, Orville."

"It's no longer necessary," he bitterly retorted, turning away from her. "My feelings are—"

"In the ditch. I told you I had a magic formula."

"I detest you!" he snapped, in his hot mortification.

"That's no more true than your love sentiments are sincere."

"That is to say," he exclaimed, once more approaching her, "that you consider me incapable of either seriously loving or hating you."

"Exactly," she frankly admitted, taking a seat at the table.

"And if I, one day, succeed in convincing you that I am serious?" he more hopefully asked.

"Then I will no longer laugh."

"Desirée," he passionately exclaimed, "since your coming here you have completely metamorphosed me; you have made of me a new being. Do not despise your own work; crown it with happiness; you can do so with a word."

She was silent, and impatiently he awaited her answer. She gazed thoughtfully on the floor for a few minutes, then, raising her head, gravely asked:

"It is serious, then?"

"Very serious," he ardently replied.

Her cheeks were slightly flushed, but her demeanor was quiet and self-possessed.

"But, Orville," she said, "you are foolish. What would your mother say if she heard you?"

"She does not hear me, nor ever will!" he eagerly cried, sinking on his knees before her.

"I will conceal my happiness from her as well as from the entire world."

He sought to take her hand, but she brusquely arose and coldly said:

"Stand up!"

He rose from his kneeling posture and remained standing before her.

She looked at him keenly, bit her lips, and then shrugging her shoulders, said:

"Are you stupid, my poor Orville? We were such good friends."

"Hush," interrupted he, suddenly; "my father is coming."

"Ah, there you are, Orville!" said the banker, as he entered the room with a letter in his hand. "So much the better. You'll mount on horseback."

"I've just alighted," announced the young man, not much pleased at the thought of being sent away at that moment.

"Mount again. It is a confidential mission. Take this letter to Havens; deliver it into the hands of the person to whom it is addressed and ask for an answer."

Orville took the letter.

"She made a pout," he muttered, as he left the room, "but she did not refuse point-blank."

"It's time to put a stop to this," thought Desirée.

"Retrenchment, my dear Desirée," said the banker, rubbing his hands, "nothing but retrenchment. My wife is determined to cut down expenses ever since Captain Fairchild insinuated that she lived too extravagantly. I believe she's doing it out of mere spite. Ah, what a man the captain is!"

"I'll be happy to leave you, and seek his protection again," quietly announced the young girl.

"How?" he cried, in great surprise. "You think of leaving us?"

"The sooner the better," she quietly declared.

"Is it because we are retrenching?" he asked.

"No," she replied, "but I must think of my future."

CHAPTER XI.

TWO HEARTS THAT BEAT AS ONE.

MR. RATHBURN did not perceive the hidden meaning in her words, but Harold, who, at that moment, entered the room, understood her only too well.

"It's as I feared," he muttered; "she finds it absolutely necessary to leave the house. But, you'll have to leave New York for England," he added, aloud.

"Leave New York!" she exclaimed disappointedly, "and you find that necessary?"

"I would not have even mentioned it," he replied, exercising a terrible self-control lest she should suspect his hidden grief, "were I not sure of confiding you to a good and honorable family. It is that of Sir Edward Forster."

"The owner of the yacht?" asked the banker.

"I now own the yacht," answered Harold with a smile.

"What," fairly roared Mr. Rathburn, "will wonders never cease? My wife turns economical and the prudent captain lavishes his money on yachts! What on earth will you do with it?"

"It has already served to make the acquaintance of Sir Edward," he replied.

"I understand," gratefully exclaimed Desirée. "Fearful lest he should be angered by Mrs. Rathburn's refusal, you bought the yacht yourself, in order to have him lend a willing ear to your application for a situation for me. How good you are!"

"You are only partly right," he modestly returned. "I've promised my mother to make no more voyages, and yet my sea-legs need a little stretching once in a while. The vessel is a steam yacht and can cross the Atlantic almost as rapidly as a regular steamer. I might make a trip across the great pond, once in a while, to see if you are satisfied with your position."

"To make me, if possible, forget my exile," she said, with tears in her eyes. "I thank you."

"See here, Captain Fairchild," cried the banker. "I'm subject to sea-sickness, but, hang it, you must take me on board on one of these excursions."

"Thanks, my kind, my dear friends," murmured Desirée, deeply moved by these expressions of friendship, "you give me courage to exile myself. When must I answer?"

"You have twenty-four hours to consider the matter."

"It is very likely that I'll accept. Yet, I'll reflect upon it."

"Now, Mr. Rathburn," said Harold, "my special object in coming here to-day was to discuss a little matter between us two—no, between us three," he added as the young girl made a motion to leave the room. "I understand that the French consul's son is going to marry your daughter?"

"It is true."

"Do you like this marriage?"

"Hardly; but Mrs. Rathburn has set her heart on it."

"And you would sacrifice your daughter to your wife's vanity?"

"Excuse me, my friend," returned the banker, as the thought arose in his mind that, perhaps, Harold himself was in love with Blanche, "you do not pretend to take a greater interest in my daughter than her mother and I?"

The captain laughed at the hint conveyed in the words.

"I make no such pretension," he replied, "but I do interest myself greatly in a young man whom this marriage renders desperate."

"Who is he?"

"My right arm, my other self, Alfred Barton," warmly replied Harold.

"I thought he was in California," exclaimed Desirée.

"He arrived the other day, and the news of Blanche's betrothal was his welcome on landing. He loves her, I can assure you, and would render her happy."

"I know it well," cordially repeated the banker, "and he was my choice for a son-in-law. But, my wife won't hear him mentioned. She's going to give her daughter's dowry."

"But Alfred asks nothing. He would marry her without a dowry."

"Then the matter might be arranged," assented Mr. Rathburn; "but, the deuce!" he added, suddenly; "it can't be! Blanche loves the young baron."

"It is impossible," affirmed Harold; "Alfred, when he left for California, believed himself loved, and he's not a conceited fool. His absence

has been taken advantage of to turn Blanche's heart against him.

"Undoubtedly," declared Desirée. "Her girlish vanity has been played upon; the baronetcy dangled before her eyes."

Blanche, at this juncture, entered the room.

"Here she is," said the banker; "speak to her yourself."

"Willingly. Miss Blanche!"

"Sir," said the young girl, approaching the captain.

He gazed at her for a moment, and then with his usual bluntness, asked:

"Is it true that you love the young Baron De Buissey?"

"Is that any of your business?" she retorted, not unnaturally indignant at this style of address.

She went to her father and asked:

"What right has he got to mix himself up in my affairs?"

"Answer him as you would our best friend," soothingly replied he. "Do you love your betrothed?"

"Can any one love him?" exclaimed Desirée.

"It's not indispensable," replied Blanche, with an assumption of worldly wisdom which was a trait of her character. "Marriage being the main object of a young lady's life, the person of one's husband is of less importance than his position in society. You see, I'm not at all romantic."

"You are not," assented Desirée, "and only eighteen years old. What frost has nipped your tender feelings in the bud?"

She gently forced her into the easy-chair as she asked the question.

"Oh, that's the style!" bitterly exclaimed Harold. "It's fashionable nowadays for young ladies to be positivists. They would blush to be deemed sentimental."

"So much the worse for them," declared Desirée.

"Yes, so much the worse," the captain earnestly affirmed, "for romance is right, the ideal is the true. Believe me, my dear Blanche, marriage is the basest of human institutions, if it is only a union of two fortunes."

"And the most sublime of divine sacraments," enthusiastically added Desirée, "when it is the union of two souls."

Unconsciously their glances met as they thus gave utterance to these noble sentiments. A deep flush suffused their cheeks, and lowering their eyes, they remained silent.

"Listen to them, my child," approvingly said Mr. Rathburn; "and listen, also, to your old father. There is a young man here who loves you."

Instantly Blanche sprang to her feet. Her whole form trembled with excitement, while her face became scarlet with blushes.

"He has returned?" she eagerly asked—"Alfred?"

"What did I tell you?" triumphantly exclaimed Harold.

"Where is all of her positivism now?" smilingly added Desirée.

"Alfred has come back," replied Mr. Rathburn. "He told Harold every thing. He's in despair."

"Poor fellow!" she pityingly murmured.

"He doesn't want your fortune," continued her father; "he's ready to marry you without a dowry, if your mother won't give it. Captain—"

The captain, however, was not there. He had slyly slipped from the room, only to return, in a few moments, bringing with him Alfred Barton, whom he had posted in the vicinity to await the result of the conference.

The meeting of the lovers was affecting, and some time elapsed before the ruffled emotions of all present were sufficiently smoothed for the conversation to continue.

"My own sweet Blanche," ardently exclaimed Alfred, "my dear captain, Mr. Rathburn, Miss Rochfort—oh, I'm too happy to speak."

"And I, too, am happy," fondly murmured Blanche, pillowing her head on his shoulder. "I wouldn't marry that ugly red-headed little De Buissey if he were ten times over a baron."

"Mr. Rathburn," cried the young man, "you give me your daughter. It is a priceless trust, but I will prove myself worthy of it, indeed I will. Blanche will not have an unhappy hour in her life. I will be to her a true, a loving husband, and to you the most dutiful of sons."

"I know it, my boy," affectionately replied the banker, shaking his hand, "I recognized your worth from the moment I first saw you. You remember the night you brought Blanche home to us from the woods?"

"Happy night!" murmured the lover.

"I heartily, willingly give my consent, but with that all is not yet obtained. We must get her mother's."

"Captain Fairchild can do every thing," confidently exclaimed Blanche. "He will convert mamma."

"I'm afraid Mrs. Rathburn would think, and with reason, that I rather exceed the rights of a simple partner. It is your father's province to discuss the matter with her."

"Will you have the courage to do it, papa?"

"Will I have the courage?" he exclaimed with an air of bravado, "when my daughter's happiness is at stake? A woman can't frighten me! Clear out, all of you, she may come in at any moment."

"Mr. Rathburn is right. Come, Alfred! And, Miss Desirée, I shall expect your answer to-morrow."

"Yes, sir," she replied.

Harold and Alfred left the house, while the two girls, hearing Mrs. Rathburn's step on the stairs, hastily made their exit, leaving the banker alone in the room.

"My wife is coming," he muttered with a wry face, "now for the tug of war."

CHAPTER XII.

CALUMNY.

MRS. RATHBURN entered the room, flushed and excited. In her hand was an open letter, which she had evidently just received and read, and which was the cause of her agitation.

"My dear," said her husband, "I've got big news to tell you."

"And so have I to tell you!"

"Let us begin with mine. I've questioned Blanche; she can't bear this baron—"

His wife made a motion to speak.

"Do not interrupt, please," he continued.

"She loves Alfred Barton and will marry no one but him."

"He has returned?"

"He was here a moment ago."

"Heaven be praised! He could not have come at a better time."

"What, you consent?" cried her husband, greatly astonished.

"With all my heart!"

"But, my dear, I don't understand this sudden conversion. I expected to find you determined that Blanche should marry the consul's son."

"The consul has broken the engagement, that's my news."

"Bravo! That's good news," he delightedly exclaimed, rubbing his hands with glee.

"Yes," she angrily retorted, "if this miser had only broken it on a question of money, but, to save his conceit he needed a nobler pretext, and he has found one, which places us in the sad necessity of immediately dismissing Miss Rochfort."

"Dismiss Desirée?" cried he, in painful surprise.

"Here's the letter which I just received from him; read it."

She handed him the paper she held in her hand. He folded out the crumpled sheet and having adjusted his eye-glasses, read as follows:

"MADAM: I braved public opinion as long as I could believe it calumniated you. It would have been too painful for me to admit that you would tolerate under your roof a lady who sustains questionable relations with your son. But after your confidences, last evening, you will understand—"

"What confidences?" he asked, "I've heard nothing."

"During the third act, at the theater, the consul drew me aside in the box."

"I did not observe it; and then?"

"He got around me by all sorts of flattery; in brief, I was caught in a trap like a fool and confessed everything."

"But what had you to confess?" he sternly demanded.

"Then you never perceived anything?" she inquired.

"That Orville has made advances to Desirée? Yes; but if you have no other proofs of—"

"I've a hundred. To go no further, I saw her receive a note from him in this very room."

"Pshaw! A French girl's pretty method of saying provoking things."

"Nevertheless, she must leave at once."

"Chase her away?" indignantly exclaimed her husband; "that would be the meanest cowardice and would destroy the poor child's good name to a certainty; for it would be taken as a concession to what the consul says is public opinion! No, no," he nobly added, "let us, on the contrary, proudly surround her with our friendship and esteem. The consul's statements

are both an insult and a calumny. He must have a grudge against the dear girl—a bitter feeling, to thus put poison in your mind. He's a dastard thus to strike at a girl's good name!"

Desirée just then was crossing the veranda, which adjoined the parlor. The banker perceived her and called her to him.

"My poor child," said he, passing his arm around her waist and drawing her closely to him. "You must not accept the situation at Sir Edward Forster's, but remain with us. It is necessary for your honor and ours," and he proceeded to narrate the substance of the baron's insinuations, adding, in conclusion: "you understand that your departure at this moment will look like an expulsion, which will give calumny the victory."

"It will, indeed," she murmured, sinking into a chair and bursting into tears. "Oh, my friend," she sobbingly continued, "how good of you to defend, to shelter me! How I thank you!"

It was too much for Mrs. Rathburn's perverse nature to let the poor girl escape without giving her at least one stab.

"My husband and I," she said, in pointed tones, "only do our duty in protecting you, but it is certain that, to say the least, you have been very imprudent in encouraging my son's infatuation."

Desirée quickly withdrew the handkerchief from her eyes, and fixing a burning glance on the lady, breathlessly asked:

"To say the least, madam! What do you mean by that?"

"Let us drop the subject, miss," replied the other, with a perceptible sneer in her tones.

"Madam," reproachfully cried the banker, deeply pained at his wife's exhibition of petty spite.

"Does she believe that her son is not an honorable lover?" hissed Desirée, through her set teeth, her whole form trembling with insulted rage.

"Desirée," piteously begged Mr. Rathburn, foreseeing the storm about to ensue.

"She believes it!" cried the girl, springing to her feet.

The hot French blood in her veins was at the boiling point. With her tapering fingers clenched into a fist, and her hand upraised, she marched directly toward where Mrs. Rathburn was standing, and for a moment it seemed as if she intended to strike her.

But the fit of rage left her, as suddenly as it had taken possession of her, and, lowering her hand to her side, she exclaimed, in heart-broken tones:

"And you think that I have paid for your hospitality with my honor. What shame!"

Her voice became choked with tears, but, impatiently brushing the drops from her eyes, she huskily added:

"Farewell. To stay another hour under this roof is shame indeed!"

"But," urged the banker, "in quitting it you are surely compromised!"

"Better that than to be reviled here!"

"It will be said that we have driven you away," declared Mrs. Rathburn.

Desirée, standing on the threshold of the room, gazed at her with an air of contempt, and in a tone of queenly pride rejoined:

"They will soon understand that I leave because it would be beneath my dignity to associate with you!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A BITTER HUMILIATION.

DESIRÉE went directly to her room and locked herself in, while Mr. and Mrs. Rathburn remained in the parlor, thunderstruck by her determined resolve.

The first thing the young girl did was to wash away the traces of her tears; then she proceeded to pack her trunks. Having accomplished this she rung the bell for the footman and admitted him when he knocked.

She was now perfectly self-possessed.

"James," she said, "can you give me the address of a respectable hotel where a young lady can pass the night?"

"There's the Clarendon, miss," he replied, adding the direction.

"Very well. Could I reach the depot in time to catch the train for New York?"

"If you ride there, miss, yes."

"You will please get me a cab at once."

"Do you not wish to take the family carriage?" he asked in some surprise.

"No. And, James, you have been a faithful attendant while I have been here. I am going to leave and—take this."

She pressed a ten-dollar bill in his hand.

"Thanks, miss!" gratefully exclaimed the servant, as he pocketed the money. "You were always kind to me."

"You will not let any of the family know where I am going."

"I understand, miss."

"My trunks may remain here until to-morrow. I will let you know where to bring them. Now go for a cab."

James did as he was directed, wondering what was up, but too discreet and well-trained to inquire.

The cab was soon at the door, and being informed of that fact, Desirée, who had meanwhile put on her shawl and hat, left the room and descended the stairs.

It was a great relief to her that Orville had not yet returned from the errand on which his father had sent him, for his presence, at her departure, under these circumstances, would have been extremely painful to her.

The banker and his wife saw her go, but neither of them dared to interfere with her purpose, or even to take leave of her.

Blanche, however, was standing on the front stoop, and, ignorant of what had happened, regarded her actions with the profoundest surprise.

"Where are you going, Desirée?" she asked, impulsively rushing into her arms.

"Do not ask me," replied she, trying to extricate herself from the young girl's embrace.

"And in a cab, too," continued Blanche. "Why don't you take the phaeton? Can't I go with you?"

"No, no! I must go alone."

"How mournfully you say that," anxiously cried the young girl; "you turn away your head so that I shouldn't see the tears in your eyes. You are trembling! Good Heavens, what is the matter?"

"Nothing," stammered Desirée, fast losing her self-control. "I love you, Blanche. Think of me sometimes! Farewell!"

She convulsively clasped the girl to her breast, pressed a burning kiss on her lips, and then, hastily entering the vehicle, bade the driver to start his horses.

"Father, mother," cried Blanche wildly as the cab dashed away. "She is leaving us; Desirée—Desirée, gone, gone! Oh, what has done this?"

She reeled and fell fainting in the arms of her parents, who had hastened to her assistance at her cry.

In the cab sat Desirée weeping as if her heart would break. From the window of the vehicle she had seen Blanche swoon and the sight moved her to the inmost depths of her soul.

She realized how deeply she loved the young girl and how passionately the latter loved her. Indeed, she felt that her heart was entwined with every member of the family, not even excepting Mrs. Rathburn, in spite of that lady's reflections upon her good name, and, but for her plain duty, she would have returned to them. As it was she shed many, many bitter tears, and only regained her composure by a strong effort of the will when the cab reached the depot.

Covering her face with a thick veil, she alighted and having paid the driver entered the station.

A few moments later the train came thundering up and with the early shades of night she was at her place of destination.

Her appearance in the hotel excited no surprise, and approaching the clerk she asked to be shown a room, which she would occupy till the next day.

The clerk, well acquainted with Mr. Rathburn, knew her as a member of his family, so himself escorted her to a pleasantly situated room.

"Does the lady desire to have supper sent to her room?" he politely asked.

"You will please send me a cup of tea, that is all."

Left to herself she took off her shawl and hat and sunk wearily into an arm-chair.

"What will I do now?" she mournfully murmured. "I hesitated to accept Sir Edward Forster's offer, because it would separate me from him, but now I grasp it like a drowning man grasps at the safety-plank. Such calumny will not pursue me into England."

It afforded some relief to her mind to have come to some determination, whatever it was, and she was even cheerful when the waiting-maid brought her the tea and a few pieces of crisp toast.

Having finished the slight repast she bade the girl, if possible, discover the Englishman's address.

This was soon ascertained, with the assistance of the clerk, and then Desirée retired for the night.

The strangeness and loneliness of her position, however, and a racking headache made sleep a stranger to her couch and she arose the next morning pale and haggard-looking.

Having partaken of a simple breakfast she paid her bill and left the hotel.

If her arrival, the evening before, had excited no comment, her departure was not unnoticed or unremarked, for the baron at a reception, at his house, on the previous evening had publicly announced the rupture of his son's engagement with Blanche, intimating as a reason what was quite sufficient to blast the reputation of the most innocent girl.

The scandal spread with that rapidity which it possesses in common with the poison of a venomous snake, and it was already the talk of the town.

Poor Desirée was soon to become aware of it. When she arrived at Sir Edward Forster's temporary residence and inquired for that gentleman she was shown into the parlor.

A few minutes later Sir Edward appeared. He was a full-blooded Englishman of the haughtiest and most prejudiced type.

"Whom have I the honor of addressing?" he politely asked as Desirée rose at his entrance.

"Captain Fairchild," she falteringly began, "was kind enough to interest himself in my behalf, as regards the position of teacher in your family and—"

"You are Miss Rochfort," he interrupted becoming suddenly reserved in his manner.

"I am."

"I'm very sorry, miss," he hesitatingly said; "you will excuse me, I am sure, but a father is obliged to exercise the greatest precaution—"

"Enough, sir," she brusquely interrupted, "I understand. You have heard the baron's base insinuations?"

She tottered rather than walked out of the room. It was the severest mortification which a proud woman could undergo.

How she got out of the house and into the street she never knew.

"I am indeed an outcast," she moaned, sinking on the stone steps of the house. "Good God, what will become of me?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CHALLENGE.

ORVILLE, being in the city, could not resist the temptation to spend the evening at the club.

It was there that, at about eleven o'clock, Alfred Barton, in a greatly excited state, came to seek him.

The young man was deeply engaged in the mysteries of faro.

"A word with you, Mr. Orville," said Alfred, agitatedly.

"Ah, Alfred, old boy," familiarly exclaimed the other; "back from California? I'm glad to see you. Fifty on the *très*," he added, turning to the dealer. "A word with me, my boy? A hundred if you want them."

"*Très* wins," exclaimed the dealer.

"Thank you! Hundred on the queen," said Orville, arranging the stakes. "Now, Alfred, fire away!"

"Before the company," nervously asked the other, adding in a low tone: "it concerns your sister."

"Ah, that's the way the wind blows, is it? I'm sorry for you, but my sister is already engaged."

"The engagement is broken."

"Queen loses!" exclaimed the dealer.

"The deuce!" ejaculated Orville. "That cleans me out," he added, and, rising from the table, he entered a private room with Alfred.

"Have a cigar," he said, offering one to the young man and lighting one for himself. "What, too agitated to smoke?" he exclaimed, as the other refused. "Is it as serious as all that?"

"Very," replied Alfred.

"Well, I can't say that I'm sorry that my sister's engagement is broken. I never liked the young baron, and as for the old hypocrite, his father, I simply detested him. You're a likely young fellow; I wouldn't mind having you for a brother-in-law. I'll say a good word for you to Blanche—"

"It is unnecessary," hastily interrupted Alfred; "we understand each other. I did not come to see you on that account, but to ask you to be my second in a duel."

"With the little baron?"

"Yes."

"But, I don't understand? If he has kindly made way for you, you owe him an acknowledgment of thanks, not a bullet in his ribs."

"But the manner of breaking the engagement! That is the insult, the infamy!"

"The infamy?"

"Yes. I heard it all from a friend on whose word I can rely. It took place at the consul's, not an hour ago. 'My son,' said the consul to the assembled guests, 'cannot marry a young girl brought up in the intimacy of a woman not above suspicion, near a mother who favors her son's vices under her own roof.'"

It was strange to observe the change in Orville's demeanor as he heard these words. His features became fixed and rigid; he threw away his cigar and rose to his feet.

"The Baron De Buissey said *that*?" he asked in cold measured tones.

"He did."

"And his son was present?"

"Yes."

"And said not a word in opposition to his father's horrible calumny?"

"He indorsed it by his silence."

"My friend, you can't fight this duel."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm going to fight it myself."

"But, Orville," exclaimed Alfred, "I'm to marry Blanche; she and your father have given me their consent; she is to be my wife."

"She is my sister," retorted Orville. "She is not the only one compromised, and is much less so than my mother and Miss Rochfort, two ladies in whom you have not the least concern, while I have a great deal. Enough. I shall make the little baron eat his own words, or his father's, which amounts to the same thing. You may have the privilege of being one of my seconds."

A slight murmur caused them to turn their heads in the direction of the main room; the door opened and there entered no less a person than the young Baron De Buissey, also a member of the club.

He was a young man of twenty-four or five years of age, somewhat below the medium height and slim in build. It is true that he had red hair, and his features a rather insipid, vapid expression, yet he was dressed neatly and with taste and altogether presented the appearance of a gentlemanly dandy.

Orville, closely followed by Alfred, issued from the private room and marched directly toward the baron.

The young man saw him coming, and though he turned a trifle pale he did not budge.

"The Baron De Buissey knows," said Orville, in loud tones, so that all should hear, "that his father has this evening uttered a series of calumnies which, to say nothing of myself, defame the character of three ladies."

"The Baron De Buissey knows," haughtily replied the other, "that his father is incapable of uttering an untruth."

Hardly had the words left his mouth when Orville threw his glove in the baron's face.

There was a murmur of applause in the room at the action.

"It is a challenge, sir," calmly said the young baron, picking up the glove. "The De Buisseys have never yet declined one. My seconds will be ready to confer with yours at any time."

"Say to-morrow morning, at eight, at the club here."

"As you please," replied the young man, and with a bow he turned and left the room.

His calmness and self-possession under the ordeal, excited even Orville's admiration.

"Well," he exclaimed, "at any rate I won't have to drag him to the field by the ears. Alfred, this is Mr. Leclercq; gentlemen, Alfred Barton, my future brother-in-law. You two gentlemen will be my seconds. The little baron is the challenged party and will have the choice of weapons. I would prefer American pistols; he will probably choose French swords. No matter, I can handle either weapon. If you can arrange the meeting to take place at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, I would be much obliged, as it would enable me to be home for dinner."

"You take it very coolly, Orville," said Alfred, gravely. "You may get wounded or, which Heaven forbid, killed."

"I may," began the young man, in serious tones; "But—pshaw!" he interrupted himself with a laugh. "Will you do me a favor?"

"A hundred; what is it?"

"Lend me a hundred dollars. I want to try my luck once more."

Alfred immediately handed him the money.

"Thanks, my dear boy. And now, my friend, go home and to bed. I'm going to stay here all

night. It's too much of a bore to travel to Innwood and back again in the morning."

"You might sleep with me," suggested the other.

"Thanks; but I never go to sleep on the night before a duel. That's a general rule. But you go. You're a better man than I am. I don't want my brother-in-law to acquire a reputation of being a man about town. Good-night, Alfred."

"Good-night, Orville."

The two young men grasped each other's hands and gazed into each other's eyes.

A firm friendship was, from that moment, established between them.

"If I had been reared in the school of poverty," muttered Orville, after Alfred had left the club-room, "I might have been like him—or Captain Fairchild—curious fellows, both of them. When they look you straight in the face it makes your eyes water."

He brushed his hand across his eyes and turning to his companions, with a somewhat forced laugh, exclaimed:

"Come, boys; we've wasted time enough. Ho, there, waiter, a basket of champagne!"

The wine was brought, and for the next hour jollity reigned supreme.

After that, the man, who, in the morning was to put his life at stake, turned to the card-table and staked his money, alternately winning and losing with a coolness and nonchalance as if he had no other and weightier thoughts to occupy his mind.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DUEL.

PROMPTLY at eight o'clock the next morning, the four seconds met in a room at the club-house. The weapon chosen was the ordinary dueling sword; the meeting was to take place at ten o'clock, in the gymnasium attached to the club-house; the fighting was to continue until either combatant was killed or wounded. The seconds were to provide the weapons and a surgeon.

Dueling, though a lost art, is still practiced even in this city among its gilded youth, and as the place of meeting is almost invariably a private club-house, little if any thing ever reaches the public ears.

The reports of actual duels, recently published in the daily papers, proves that we are attempting no fanciful description in what we are about to record.

The simple conditions, narrated above, were accepted by both principals, and promptly at the appointed hour they faced each other, sword in hand.

Both of them were perfectly cool and self-possessed. It was evident that this was not the first "affair of honor" to either of them.

The rules of courtesy which characterize all such affairs were scrupulously observed, and, to a casual spectator, the whole proceeding appeared more like a friendly trial of skill than an encounter for life or death.

Alfred, who was the most excited of the group, gave the word to begin.

The swords flashed in the air and then met with a ringing clash.

The combat had opened.

Orville rushed impetuously to attack, while the baron took up a position of defense. The former had a great contempt for the latter's skill, but he altered his opinion when he saw all his thrusts neatly parried, and was finally obliged to retire with a slight cut on his hand.

This ended the first round, with first blood for the baron.

Orville had his wound sponged and the flow of blood stopped, and then time was again called.

He was more on his guard now, and after several rapid passes and counterpasses, succeeded in wounding his opponent on the shoulder.

The honors, so far, were equally divided.

After the baron's wound was examined and bandaged a consultation was held between the seconds, in which it was concluded to let the duel continue.

Both contestants were now in earnest to bring matters to a climax, and the combat was waged with furious vigor on both sides.

Orville's excess of strength finally prevailed over the other's superior skill, and he ran his sword completely through the baron's side.

The wounded man staggered back, dropped his weapon from his nerveless grasp and sunk fainting to the floor, bathed in his own blood.

"That renders him *hors du combat*," coolly exclaimed Orville, wiping the red stains from his sword.

"You've killed him," ejaculated Alfred in awe-stricken tones.

"Nonsense, my boy. Just touched a rib," laughingly retorted the other. "It's a favorite thrust of mine and produces a flesh-wound which will keep him in bed for a fortnight."

"I hope so."

"You will hear what the surgeon says."

The physician examined the wound of the unconscious man and declared it to be of the nature described by Orville. He applied whatever remedies he had on hand and advised that the young man be taken home as soon as possible.

This was speedily accomplished and a statement of the affair having been drawn up and signed by the seconds, the party adjourned to the dining-room for lunch.

The news of the result of the duel had preceded Orville, and when he entered the dining-room he was received with a perfect ovation.

On all sides assurances of renewed confidence poured in upon him; one and all covered the baron and his son with ridicule.

As Orville laughingly declared:

"There's nothing like a sword-thrust, in season, to bring about a change of opinion, boys. We have the laughers on our side now. Five hundred to one that the French consul will send in his resignation within a week."

The wager was a fair one and the odds heavy but it found no takers.

After the lunch was over Orville and Alfred left the club-room.

"I guess I'll go to Innwood," said the former. "My folks will be wondering what has become of me. Come and see us this evening, Alfred, sure?"

The young man promised him to do so, and they separated.

"I wonder," mused Orville, as he walked along the street, "whether Desirée has heard of the scandal and what she thinks of it? Poor girl, she is indeed innocent, and yet I owe her a reparation."

He had not proceeded far when he stumbled against his father.

"Ah, there you are, Orville," cried the banker; "you have heard—"

"Every thing. It was that which kept me from home last night. But I've fixed the matter."

"How so?"

"I've given the little baron a dose of steel that he'll remember for some time."

"Good, it serves him right. But, that's not the worst. Desirée has left us, and we don't know what's become of her. Captain Fairchild offered her a place at Sir Edward Forster's and she may have gone there. I'm just on my way to find out. But do go home now. Your mother is very anxious about you."

"I was just on my way to the depot."

"We're all in New York. We came here this morning; you will find your mother at the house."

"So much the better; I'll go there at once."

He hastened home. Arrived there he found his mother in a state of complete prostration.

"Oh, Orville," she exclaimed, as he entered the room. "I'm so glad to see you. I feared—"

"That I had eloped with Desirée?" he laughingly interrupted.

"Yes."

Then the scandal would have had some foundation in fact.

"It is not true, then?"

"Not a word, not a shadow of foundation."

"And I believed it, and virtually drove the poor girl away."

"You, mother?"

Mrs. Rathburn related what had occurred on the day before.

"You did very—very wrong," he said, when she finished.

"I know it and am very sorry. Your father and Blanche are out hunting her up."

"I just met father. He has not yet found her."

"Blanche may be more successful. By the way, Captain Fairchild was just here and inquired for you."

"In relation to this unlucky matter, of course," said Orville, with a sour face.

"I don't know, I did not see him."

"Perhaps Desirée is at his house."

"I don't believe so. If she were he would have left word. He spoke to the servant and asked if you were in. Finding that you were absent he left a note and went away immediately. There it is on the table."

The young man took up the note and opened it.

It was hastily written in pencil and contained only the words:

"Mr. Orville will greatly oblige Captain Fairchild by calling at his residence at once."

"Very brief and formal," muttered he. "It portends a lecture. I'll have to submit to it, I suppose. He's our partner, you know," and he quickly directed his way toward Captain Fairchild's residence.

And what, in the meantime, had become of poor Desirée?

CHAPTER XVI.

NOBLE SON, NOBLER MOTHER.

WE take the reader to Harold's house a short time before Orville reached there.

Mrs. Fairchild was sitting on the sofa, quietly knitting when the door was abruptly opened and her son entered in a state of wild excitement.

"Misfortune," he cried, violently throwing off his hat.

"What has happened?" she exclaimed, dropping her knitting in surprise.

"What was to be expected," he bitterly declared. "Miss Rochfort is compromised," and in agitated tones he related what is already known.

"It's my fault," concluded Harold, grinding his teeth with rage. "I ought to have dragged her sooner out of that confounded house. It was evident that she loved the young rascal. Now the mischief is done."

"What will become of her?"

"She will go to England. She hesitated on account of being obliged to leave the country, but now she will accept it as a safety plank. The scandal will not cross the ocean."

"Would not her marriage with Orville crush out the scandal?"

"Perhaps," admitted Harold, "if some one would compel him to do her that act of justice."

"Be that friend," she continued, folding her arms around his neck, "for Desirée—for your brother's sake."

He released himself from his mother's clasp and uttered a bitter laugh.

"My brother!" he exclaimed. "It's a fact, it's true, he is my brother!"

He clenched his hand and bit his lips to keep down his anger in his mother's presence.

"Do you think," he added, "that that young man will ever consent to a forced marriage, or that his mother will ever let him wed a girl without a rich dowry?"

"If that's the only obstacle," she eagerly interrupted.

Her noble heart touched him as it always did.

She was right. Desirée's honor, perhaps her very life, was at stake. He would not let his own hopeless love, his intense jealousy of his brother, stand in the way of securing for her the only reparation which could save her.

"I will ransom her," he said, taking his mother's hand and raising it to his lips, "as I would that you had been ransomed."

"My noble son!" she exclaimed, with infinite gratitude and tenderness.

"My nobler mother!" he rejoined, with a smile.

"Miss Rochfort," announced the servant, at that moment.

"I would have preferred not to see her now," muttered Harold, his brow darkening.

Desirée slowly entered the room.

What a change the last twenty-four hours had produced in her!

She was no longer the bright, careless, mischievous girl, whose coquettish ways had captured all hearts. Gone was the merry sparkle from her eyes, the rippling laugh from her lips, the blush of beauty from her cheeks.

Pale, haggard, with downcast eyes and mournful mien she slowly advanced, like a prisoner about to receive sentence of death.

She bowed to Mrs. Fairchild, who silently yet kindly motioned her to a seat; then she turned to salute Harold, but he turned his head aside.

"He believes me guilty," she murmured, with quivering lips. "It is the bitterest drop of all."

She remained standing, and in hollow, spirit-broken tones said:

"I come to bid you good by, madam; I have taken passage in the ship which is about to sail for New Orleans."

"Then you are not going to England?" asked Mrs. Fairchild, in surprise.

"No, madam," she bitterly replied. "Sir Edward Forster refuses to receive me."

"That was to be foreseen," muttered Harold, aside.

"And what will you do in New Orleans?" asked his mother.

"Who knows?" despairingly answered the poor girl. "God is good!"

"When does the boat leave?" inquired Harold.

"At high tide this evening," she responded, her eyes fixed on the floor.

"Wait for me here."

He took his hat, and without saluting her left the room.

As soon as Mrs. Fairchild was alone with her, she took her kindly by the hand and gently said:

"All is not lost, my poor Desirée. Harold has gone to find Mr. Orville and make him keep his promise."

"What promise?" she sorrowfully asked.

"Why, to marry you."

"But he never spoke of marriage to me!" she said, a slight flush tinting her pallid cheeks.

"Not even promised to marry you and yet—"

The good lady hesitated.

Desirée, however, understood her, and in a dull voice replied:

"So people say."

"But what do you say?" asked Mrs. Fairchild, with a sigh.

The young girl suddenly drew herself erect, and with a flash of her former pride haughtily responded:

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" ejaculated the other.

"What good would it do?" continued she, relapsing into her melancholy mood. "You cannot argue with calumny. It crushes you or is crushed. But to defend yourself is vain; to sue for pardon is to have it refused—the bitterest of humiliations. They can force me on my knees, but they can never make me humble myself before them."

"I understand this obstinate resignation," exclaimed Mrs. Fairchild, with tears in her eyes. "I know it! It is the pride of innocence!"

She drew Desirée to her embrace and, for a long time, held her clasped to her heart.

It was the first expression of sympathy, of faith in her purity, which the poor girl had received since her bitter mortification at the Englishman's residence. It unlocked the flood-gates of her soul and the two women mingled their tears.

"Alas," exclaimed Mrs. Fairchild, drying her eyes. "that I should be, perhaps, the only person, whom this haughty silence can convince! Honor must be restored to you as if you had really lost it; that is what Harold is attempting, at this very moment. Mr. Orville must marry you."

"Marry me?" ejaculated Desirée, smiling sadly through her tears. "Why, I do not love him!"

"You have, at least, some kind regard for him. I do not propose a marriage of love, but one of reason, or rather reparation."

"Yes, yes, you are right," said Desirée, as she comprehended the lady's meaning; "it would be honor, rescue, nay more, it would be life. But, alas, why should Orville consent? He owes me no sort of reparation; he has done me no sort of wrong: why then demand of him to marry one so poor?"

"Not so poor as you imagine," Mrs. Fairchild, assured her; "you have for the first thing, five thousand dollars."

"A hundred thousand would be small in his mother's eyes."

"Wait a moment; there's the legacy."

"What legacy?" demanded Desirée, greatly surprised. "I receive a legacy? From whom?"

"Perhaps it's a gift," rejoined Mrs. Fairchild, sadly embarrassed. "I don't know exactly. Harold has just received the news and is taking it to Mr. Orville."

The young girl gazed keenly at the lady, whose cheeks assumed a conscious blush.

"It is a gift," said she, with a sad smile; "it is from a mother and son who love me as if I were their own child. Oh, hearts of gold! she fervently ejaculated, "tender, generous souls! Heaven grant them all the happiness which it withholds from me!"

She impulsively clasped Mrs. Fairchild to her bosom and impressed a kiss of veneration on her forehead.

"Ah, Desirée," sighed the old lady, "it is not always the good who are happy, or you would never have cause to shed a tear."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TWO BROTHERS.

HAROLD now re-entered the room, but alone. "Already back?" exclaimed his mother. "Then you did not find him in?"

"He had not come home yet, though they were expecting him every moment. I left word and he will probably soon be here."

"I know all you wish to do for me, Mr. Fairchild," said Desirée timorously. "I accept it with gratitude. You believe me guilty, but if you succeed in your mission you will see that I am not unworthy your paternal regard."

"Paternal," muttered he, between his teeth. "Be easy," he added aloud, "you shall have your reparation. I guarantee it."

"Heaven grant it!"

"I'll fix the price," he muttered to himself.

"Some, one is coming up the stairs," exclaimed Mrs. Fairchild, as the sound of a man's footsteps became audible.

"It is Orville!" Desirée well knew his step.

"Come, Desirée," said Mrs. Fairchild, and tenderly passing her arms round the young girl's waist, she gently led her into an adjoining room.

Hardly had they left when Orville entered the first apartment.

"I received your note, sir," he said to Harold, "almost immediately after you left, and I have hastened here at your desire."

"I thank you, sir," coldly replied the other. "No doubt you know what happened last night at the consul's?"

"I do and can tell you that the matter is satisfactorily arranged."

"Indeed!" asked Harold in some surprise.

In a tone of easy nonchalance Orville related the incident of his duel with the young baron.

Harold listened to him in silence and when he concluded simply asked:

"And what is to become of Miss Rochfort?"

"Ain't she going to England?"

"No, sir," sternly returned Harold. "The scandal has deprived her of her means of earning a livelihood."

"Poor girl," sympathetically exclaimed Orville, carelessly lounging on the sofa. "I'm sorry to hear it. What can be done for her?"

"Think," impressively said Harold, taking a chair near him.

The young man thought a moment and then asked:

"Would she accept—"

"Money," contemptuously interrupted the other. "It is a name, sir, that she has lost; that must be restored to her, untarnished and sustained."

"Well, my dear sir," blandly returned Orville, "can I restore what I did not deprive her of? If I understand you rightly you simply want me to marry her."

"Exactly, sir."

"Is this kind of business included in your partnership?" he angrily asked, rising to his feet and walking to the other side of the room.

"No, sir," calmly replied Harold, repressing, with an effort, his own rising wrath, "but I am greatly interested in Miss Rochfort. I know and you know that she has been defamed, injured, banished on account of, if not by you; ruined, if not in her reputation, at least in her means of gaining a livelihood; that she was your guest and under your protection; that you individually owe her a reparation, and that there is no other than marriage. That is what I do know."

Orville looked at him and in his taunting way replied:

"If you had plowed the seas less, my dear sir, you would also know that there are positions for which no one is responsible, as they are false ones and carry their own danger. Governesses, companions, piano-teachers—"

Harold gave an involuntary start, to which, however, Orville paid no attention.

"It is all one," he smilingly continued, "all these poor girls are suspected from the single fact that there is a young man in the house."

"I know it," bitterly admitted the other.

"So you see," added Orville, "I have not compromised Desirée; it was her position."

"Will you deny that you made advances to her?" asked Harold, nervously twitching his finger.

"Now you are asking for confidential communications," laughingly retorted the young man.

Harold, in spite of himself, was fast losing his temper.

"In brief," he irritably asked, "do you love her or not?"

"Well," drawled Orville, with exasperating coolness, "yes and no."

"In a word, you do love her but will not marry her, while you will marry some one whom you do not love at all, but who has fifty or a hundred thousand dollars."

"I would prefer one with a hundred thousand dollars," admitted he.

"Very well. Miss Rochfort has that amount." Orville started back and gazed keenly at Harold.

"Oh, oh!" he exclaimed, "where does it come from, if I may ask without indiscretion?"

"I have told you that I regarded myself as her protector—her guardian."

"Ah, you need gray hair to perfect that role," ironically retorted the young man.

"Under what other title do you give Miss Rochfort a dowry?" insolently asked Orville.

"You calumniate her to withdraw yourself from an obligation of honor. I recognize your blood. You are indeed your grandfather's offspring."

"What do you mean by that?" cried Orville, also becoming angry.

"That your grandfather was a calumniator and a dastard who dared not do right!"

"Repeat that!" exclaimed the young man, drawing off his glove.

"A miserable wretch—"

Orville threw his glove into the speaker's face.

A rage, such as his mother had once before witnessed, took possession of Harold.

He uttered a cry like that of a wild beast, and with those terrible fingers, which had almost crushed the life out of the leader of the mutineers, extended, he made a dash for the young man's throat.

Suddenly, however, he paused, and wringing his hands with the agony of his suppressed passion, hoarsely cried:

"It's lucky for you that you are my own brother!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

REPARATION.

THE astonishment depicted in Orville's face at this announcement, was supreme. For a moment he could scarcely believe that he had heard aright; then, like a flash, the story his father had told him came into his mind.

"Your brother!" he exclaimed. "Can you be—yes; you are the son of the piano-teacher! I know the story, and can assure you that we have not a single drop of the same blood in our veins."

"That was your father's calumny," dignifiedly replied Harold, now having completely mastered his sudden rage. "I have, however, within the last three days entirely refuted that awful falsehood."

"In what way?"

"By order of my mother," he proudly replied, "I saved from failure your father, who is also my father."

"By order of your mother?" ejaculated the young man, thunderstruck.

"Yes, sir," quickly answered he, "she still has some regard for the honor of a family which cared so little for her own. I took the helm of your ship in distress; I saved your sister, who is my sister, from an unhappy marriage; that, too, by the order of my mother, and finally, I have just been slapped in the face by you and did not strangle you. Do you now believe I am your brother?"

Orville's inherent noble nature asserted itself as he heard these words.

"Brother," he exclaimed, "forgive me!"

Harold opened his arms and Orville rushed into his embrace.

For some moments they remained locked in each other's arms.

"Do you now believe you may accept Desirée's dowry from me?" smilingly asked Harold.

"Yes, noble brother! What a wretched, insignificant man I am beside you! But, you will make me worthy of being your brother; you will raise me to your standard. There's good material in me, you will see."

"I am sure of it, now," said the captain, cordially grasping him by the hand. "Let us love one another like brothers, but for the world at large let us be only friends. Do not confide to any one what you have just now learned, not even to our father."

"What?" asked Orville, in surprise. "Shall he never know—"

"Never! You may understand what price I attach to your silence from the fact that I have renounced marriage, family, all, that I might guard my mother's secret."

"I understand you. Depend on me."

"Miss Blanche Rathburn," announced the servant, at that moment.

"My sister—" exclaimed Orville; then, recollecting, he smilingly corrected himself—"our sister."

"Hush!" whispered Harold. Then turning to the servant, he added:

"Beg my mother and Miss Rochfort to return here."

The attendant left the room, at the same time admitting Blanche.

"Mamma sends me in a *coupé*," said she, "to bring home Desirée. Is she here?"

"She is."

"Oh, I'm so glad! And since I find you here," she added, turning to her brother, "I've a good mind to tell you what I think."

"Say what you think," said Orville, with a smile.

"I think you ought to marry Desirée, if she will have you!"

"That's not your mother's idea," suggested her brother.

"No. It is father's and mine. But we'll bring mamma around, I'm sure, if Captain Fairchild will be good enough to take a hand in it."

"He has done so," declared Orville.

"Oh, Mr. Fairchild," gratefully exclaimed Blanche; "you are our providence."

"Well, embrace him then," laughingly said her brother.

"With all my heart," cried the impetuous girl, flinging her arms around Harold's neck.

He understood the delicate way in which Orville had procured for him the happiness of embracing his sister, and thanked him with a glance. Mrs. Fairchild and Desirée now entered the room.

"Desirée, my sister!" cried Blanche, fondly embracing her, "how happy I am to see you again!"

"Thanks, dear Blanche," gratefully exclaimed she, releasing herself from the warm clasp. "Mr. Fairchild," she added, turning to him, "have you succeeded?"

Harold hesitated a moment before uttering the words which would put a tombstone on the grave of his own love.

It was the supremest act of self-denial of his whole life.

"Miss Rochfort," he at length said, in a voice which slightly trembled, in spite of his effort to appear calm, "I have the honor of asking your hand in marriage for my friend Orville."

Desirée gazed for a moment at him, then her glance rested on him who was to be her husband.

An intense silence reigned in the room.

"Heaven be praised," she murmured, in a low tone, her hands crossed on her breast and her eyes fixed on the floor. "I trembled lest you should fail. What an honor for a poor girl, given over to opprobrium and misery!"

She suddenly raised her head and drawing herself to her fullest height, looked fixedly at Orville, and proudly exclaimed:

"I reject him!"

"What?" cried he, in tones of the most intense mortification.

"Pshaw," disappointedly interposed Blanche.

"You reject him!" repeated Mrs. Fairchild in the greatest surprise.

Harold's heart gave a great throb of joy, yet he was perplexed by her decision.

"You yourself, with gratitude, accepted the idea of this offer," he said to her.

"I did," she ardently replied, "because it contained my only possible reparation—my refusal! If I do not love the gentleman enough to marry him, who will believe that I loved him enough to sacrifice my good name to him?"

They all comprehended her now.

With a word she had triumphed over her detractors.

"And now, farewell!" she sorrowfully continued. "I confide to you all, in leaving, the care of defending me."

She approached Mrs. Fairchild, who was too moved to speak, and reverently kissed her on the forehead.

"Farewell, madam," she said, with quivering lips; "you have been like a mother to me; I will remember it as long as I live!"

Mrs. Fairchild silently returned her kiss and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

The young girl turned toward Orville and a faint smile flitted across her lips as she beheld his woe-begone countenance.

"Farewell, Orville," she said, extending her hand to him; "do not look so mortified. Let us part good friends."

He took her hand and raised it to his lips.

He could not have expressed his respect for her in a more delicate way.

"Blanche!"

The young girl flew into her embrace, and pillowing her head on her shoulder, burst into tears.

Desirée fondly stroked her golden, silky hair and softly murmured:

"You called me sister, dear Blanche. I will never forget it. Be happy for the two of us."

She resigned the weeping girl to Mrs. Fairchild and then turned to bid farewell to him, her last, her best, her greatest friend.

Harold was leaning against the mantle-piece, his eyes downcast, his great, big heart heaving with convulsive emotion.

Desirée advanced several steps toward him, then paused.

Her limbs trembled so violently that she could scarcely support herself.

How she loved him!

How clearly she read her soul now that the moment had come when she was to forever part from him!

She intended to express her gratitude for his unselfish friendship, but she dared not trust herself to do it, lest the love, fluttering in her heart like a caged bird, should find an outlet through her lips.

She turned away her head and brokenly murmured:

"Farewell, Mr. Fairchild!"

He made a motion as if to detain her, to clasp her to his breast, to break with his cruel destiny, but the fear that her heart did not throb in unison with his own, the thought that even she might be wanting in veneration for his mother, restrained him, and in forced, unnatural tones he replied:

"Farewell, miss!"

Slowly and with tottering steps she moved to the door, but Blanche, still weeping, intercepted her exit.

"You *shan't* go way," she hysterically cried; "I won't let you go. Why don't you marry my brother, since you are friends with him?"

To Orville the truth came like a flash of lightning.

"I know the reason," he suddenly exclaimed.

"It is because she loves another."

"Orville!" cried the poor girl, imploringly.

"Whom?" eagerly asked Blanche.

"A blind man who won't see," he replied, pointing to Harold; "a deaf man who won't hear; a timid man who does not deem himself young enough or handsome enough to be beloved; an idiot, who throws her into another's arms, gives her a dowry—"

"Orville!" wildly, madly interrupted Desirée.

"It is not true!"

Harold's hopes, which had risen high during Orville's words, were blighted by this declaration.

"I know it but too well, miss," he exclaimed, in hollow, heart-broken tones, sinking into an easy-chair and burying his face in his hands.

Desirée's face was fiery red with blushes. She stood there rooted to the floor, unable to move, incapable of speaking.

Mrs. Fairchild, weeping like a child, pointed to the crushed form of her son, and supplicatingly exclaimed:

"Desirée!"

She understood. It was no time for false delicacy. His own mother bade her speak.

She tremblingly approached the chair until she stood before him.

"If, however, it were true," she began in a low tone; "if in leaving you I read my heart aright; if what, until now, I have taken for gratitude, for respect and admiration were another, a deeper, a holier sentiment; if I held out my hand to you—"

Harold sprung to his feet, his whole countenance radiant with happiness.

Miss—Desirée, he stammered.

All doubt, all hesitation were at rest. Opening wide his arms, in a tone of infinite love and pathos he exclaimed:

"Desirée!"

"Harold!"

That clasp was the clasp of wordless love.

A double marriage—Alfred and Blanche, and Harold and Desirée, was soon publicly celebrated; and if Desirée ever recalled the sorrow that came with the shadow on her good name, it melted into tears of joy that out of it had come unspeakable happiness.

Orville has not married, but he has done himself the credit to make for himself a good name which to-day is a synonym of business honor and success. He loves the husband of Desirée with a tenderness beautiful to see, but no one ever guesses the secret of their brotherhood.

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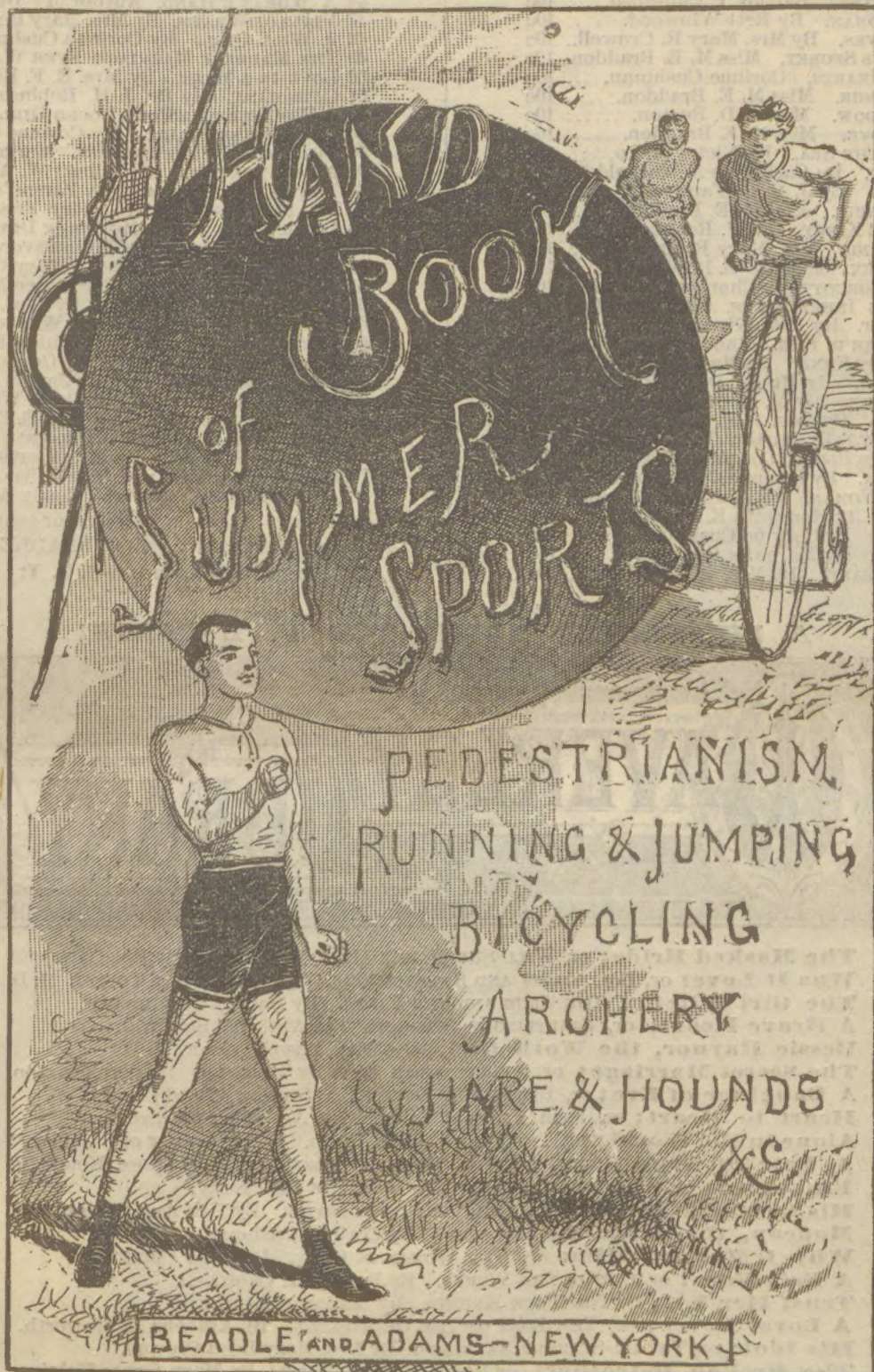
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